RESTORATION AND DOMINION

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AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON THE PROPHETS

GARY NORTH

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Ezekiel

Hosea

Micah

Amos

Haggai

Zechariah

Malachi

PREFACE

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord *thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the* Lord *thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the* Lord *thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the* Lord *thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the* Lord *thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the* Lord *thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the* Lord *thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the* Lord *thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. And the* Lord *thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the* Lord, *and do all his commandments which I command thee this day.*

DEUTERONOMY 30:1–8

This passage was the judicial foundation of the message of the prophets before the dual exiles of Israel and Judah to Assyria and Babylon, respectively. The pre-exilic prophets brought covenant lawsuits against the northern and southern kingdoms. They warned of national exile to come. But they also promised geographical restoration, just as Moses had promised.

There would be no escape from captivity, Jeremiah told Judah. He told them that Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant (Jer. 27:6). All nations would serve him (v. 7). Any nation that resisted, God would punish (v. 8). There were no loopholes. There was no fallback position. God was serious about enforcing the ultimate negative corporate sanction that was associated with the Mosaic law: captivity.

Isaiah had brought a similar message over a century earlier. "Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed" (Isa. 1:24–28). First captivity, then restoration. Some might call it *reconstruction*.

A. Covenant Lawsuits

The prophets served as judicial agents of God under the Mosaic Covenant. They brought a series of covenant lawsuits against Israel and Judah. These lawsuits invoked specific Mosaic laws. The two nations had broken these laws. Then the prophets warned of God's sanctions in history: positive and negative. The main passages in the Old Covenant that undergirded the sanctions associated with these covenant lawsuits were Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Anyone who attempts to explain the message of any prophet, but who does not begin with *the Mosaic statute invoked by the prophet*, is likely to misinterpret his message. This is even more true of an assessment of the prophets taken as a whole. The message of the prophets was clear. The nations of Israel and Judah had a covenantal obligation to honor the Mosaic law's statutes—in thought, word, and deed. The two nations had failed to do this. Judgment was coming, but geographical restoration would come after judgment's negative sanctions.

This line of argumentation should seem revolutionary to no one. Yet in this, the second decade of the twenty-first century, Christians in the pews are unfamiliar with this perspective. The people in the pews have not been taught that *the prophets' warnings were carefully structured covenant lawsuits*. They have never heard of a covenant lawsuit. Few of them have ever heard a sermon on what a covenant is, let alone a covenant lawsuit. This is not taught at seminary, either, except perhaps in an elective course on the prophets, which few students take.

The prophets' message had to do with reform. Specifically, the message of the prophets was for a restoration of social justice through the action of the civil government. They demanded widespread repentance. *This repentance involved restoring the institutional arrangements*

mandated by the Mosaic law. The looming negative sanctions were corporate; hence, the reformation demanded by the prophets was corporate. It would come after national captivity.

Above all, repentance required *a reformation of the courts*, both civil and ecclesiastical. The courts had violated three of four laws—three Mosaic laws and a fourth which had been announced by God to Moses just before the exodus from Egypt.

> One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you (Ex. 12:49).[1]

> Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause (Ex. 23:6).

> Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause (Ex. 23:3).[2]

> Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour (Lev. 19:15).[3]

They had honored only Exodus 23:3. Any discussion of the prophets that does not include a discussion of these four laws is misleading. These four verses established the greatest gift of the Old Covenant to modern civilization: *the ideal of the rule of law*. The rule of law is summarized in this phrase, which appears repeatedly in both testaments: "no respect for persons."

> Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it (Deut. 1:17).[4]

In modern American parlance, this phrase describes the fundamental violation of the rule of law: "Different strokes for different folks." This principle of law leads to favoritism, injustice, and tyranny. Left unchecked, it produces social breakdown. *Built into God's social order are negative sanctions against injustice*. Honesty really is the best policy. Dishonesty produces poverty.[5] If this built-in system of

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

2. *Ibid*., Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 50.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 14.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 4.

5. The greatest modern example of this is the Soviet Union, which visibly collapsed economically in the late 1980s and then collapsed politically on December 31, 1991. Its

social causation is widely ignored, God will eventually intervene. The prophets warned Israel and Judah of God's looming intervention into history. To avoid this, the prophets said, the rebellious nations had to restore God's law: the same strokes for different folks.

B. Judicial Impartiality and Economic Inequality

When God's law is enforced impartially, the result is inequality in every area of life. This is because people with different talents, visions, commitments, and expectations will produce different results whenever God's law is enforced without respect to persons. In order to be able to promise the voters to produce anything like economic equality, a civil government could not enforce the law equally.[6] It would have discriminate between economic classes. This is what Exodus 12:49 prohibits.

The Bible specifically teaches against equality of results. It teaches the reversal of social and economic positions. When the nation repents, those who were on top fall; those who were on the bottom rise. The finest biblical statement of this reversal is Mary's testimony, sometimes called the *magnificat*. The language of the King James Version has come down to English-speaking Protestants through the centuries.

> And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away (Luke 1:50–53).[7]

The Bible teaches economic inequality between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. Deuteronomy 28 is quite specific, both with respect to positive economic sanctions and negative economic sanctions.[8]

> The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand:

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people had been poor from the beginning in 1917. They remained significantly poorer than citizens in the West until the very end.

6. In fact, no society in the last century of study has ever achieved anything like equality. The famous 20%-80% distribution revealed by Alfredo Pareto in 1897 reigns supreme. About 20% of a nation's inhabitants own about 80% of the wealth. No one knows why this 20-80 rule operates in the area of income distribution, let alone so many other areas of life, but it does.

7. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion; An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

8. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

> and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them (Deut. 28:12–13).

> The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail. Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee (Deut. 28:43–45).[9]

Economic equality? This doctrine is not taught in the Bible. There are always economic winners and losers in history. This outcome is built into biblical law, which involves judicial sanctions, and is also built into God's general sanctions as the cosmic judge. The prophets came to warn the people against God's looming sanctions: positive for the invaders, negative for the Israelites. Their listeners would either repent or be brought low. They did not repent. Therefore, they were brought low. For the defender of equality, the testimony of the prophets is an affront, a sacrilege. So, they select carefully from the prophetic lawsuits.

The Bible teaches this principle: *equality before the law*. F. A. Hayek, the legal theorist and Nobel Prize-winning economist, has summarized the economic implication of the principle of equality before the law: *inequality of economic outcomes*.

> From the fact that people are very different it follows that, if we treat them equally, the result must be inequality in their actual position, and that the only way to place them in an equal position would be to treat them differently. Equality before the law and material equality are therefore not only different but are in conflict with each other; and we can achieve either one or the other, but not both at the same time. The equality before the law which freedom requires leads to material inequality.[10]

C. The Social Gospel and Liberation Theology

There is a system of interpretation of the prophets that implicitly denies the principle of the rule of law. The promoters of this view ig-

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 70.

10. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 87.

nore three of the four verses. They may quote Exodus 23:6, "Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause," but they never quote Exodus 23:3: "Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause."[11] These expositors are defenders of what is known as the Social Gospel. A more radical version of this message is known as Liberation Theology. Liberation theologians in the Roman Catholic Church, especially in Latin America, from the mid-1960s through the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, insisted that the prophets brought a message consistent with Marxism. Their peers in Protestant American pulpits did not go this far. They claimed merely that the prophets were advocating a welfare state economy, probably close to that of Scandinavia.

The older form of the Social Gospel, which had become dominant in America's mainline denominations by 1960, first appeared in the 1880s. It was promoted by theological liberals who denied the inerrancy of the original manuscripts of the Bible, the virgin birth, and the doctrine of hell. After 1960, mainline denominations began to shrink. Beginning in the late 1960s, the economic conclusions of the Social Gospel began to be imported into evangelical churches by young men who had been radicalized by their opposition to the Vietnam war (1963–75) and by their participation in the early phase of the civil rights movement (1956–70).[12] They still claimed to be evangelicals, but they came with the old Social Gospel's agenda for reform. They attempted to mix biblical oil and welfare state water. They still do.[13]

Because they correctly perceive that the Mosaic law testifies against their economic views, they have adopted a self-conscious tactic of obfuscation. They appeal to the prophets rather than to the Mosaic law. This raises a major problem: *the prophets never mentioned any reform that even remotely resembled the forced redistribution of wealth by the state*. They called for individual restitution, as the Mosaic law required, case by case, for individuals' specific violations of the Mosaic law. But there was no hint in the message of the prophets that economic inequality could or should be remedied by government actions: by graduated income taxes, or the regulation prices, or food stamps (digits), or any other program associated with the modern welfare state. So, the eco-

11. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 50.

12. It was possible to oppose the Vietnam War and promote racial equality in the civil justice system without being radicalized. I am living proof. I read and approved of Martin Luther King's book, *Stride Toward Freedom* (1958), in 1960.

13. Joel McDurmon, *God versus Socialism: A Biblical Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009), Part 2.

nomic reforms called for by liberation theologians and defenders of the Social Gospel are superimposed on the language of the prophets and said to be not only consistent with what the prophets taught but morally mandatory for any society that calls itself Christian. This is deception: either self-deception or self-conscious deception, but deception nonetheless.

These proponents of coercive wealth redistribution by the state call for the reform of oppressive social structures. So did the prophets. But the prophets called for a return to those structures that had been mandated by the Mosaic law. The promoters of the Social Gospel always insist that they have no such agenda. Instead, they say that they want merely to return to the true meaning—the hidden meaning—of the Mosaic law, not its specifics. There is a reason for their refusal to invoke the Mosaic law. *The Mosaic law defended the private property social order*. This defense began with a commandment: "Thou shalt not steal."[14] Social Gospel advocates want to modify this commandment as follows: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

D. Bait and Switch

In the United States, there is a marketing practice called bait and switch. A local company advertises that it has a low-cost item for sale. The shopper arrives at the store, ready to buy. He is then told by the salesman that the item is out of stock. Then the salesman uses his selling skills to sell the shopper a higher priced product. This practice is illegal in most jurisdictions. It is based on fraud. It steals people's time. It also steals their hopes.

Any theologian or social theorist who invokes the authority of the Old Testament prophets, but who then refuses also to affirm the continuing judicial authority of the Mosaic statutes that were invoked by the prophets, is using a bait-and-switch marketing technique. He is attempting to gain authority for his suggested economic reforms. He seeks such authority from the prophets. Then, having gained the listener's attention and even support, he switches. He affirms, in the name of the prophets, some half-baked theory of economic reform suggested by his socialistic professor of sociology two decades ago in college.

The defenders of the Social Gospel constantly cite the prophets, but they do not cite them in search of specific Mosaic statutes. In-

14. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 28.

stead, they invoke the prophetic tradition—undefined—as a justification for some Left-wing reform project. In all cases, they call for state coercion in the name of social justice. They conflate state and society, as if the state were not just one aspect of society, which includes families, churches, voluntary associations, businesses, and schools. When they say "society," they really mean "state." This is a serious misunderstanding of the biblical concept of society.

In this book, I exegete every passage in the prophets that refers to economics. As you will see, *nothing that any prophet said had anything to do with central economic planning, state wealth-redistribution projects, or the expansion of government-funded industries*. Except for Isaiah, they had little to say about economics. What little they said had to do with the enforcement of Mosaic statutes.

E. Economic Sins: Low Priority

What is striking is how little attention the prophets paid to economics. This calls into question the theological relevance of liberation theologians in mainline American denominations and their allies within the evangelical camp. They have rested much of their case in favor of socialism or the welfare state on the prophets. They have created an illusion that the prophets were concerned greatly about economic matters.

The prophets were concerned about ethical rebellion and religious apostasy. They did not ignore these issues as manifested in the economy, but economic transgressions were not high on their list of representative evils.

Their condemnations were invariably tied to case laws of the Mosaic law. They brought covenant lawsuits against Israel and Judah. They invoked the Mosaic law. The liberationists rarely cite the specific case laws, nor do they provide detailed exegesis of how these laws were to be applied, what the results were when enforced, and what God's negative sanctions were when they were not enforced. There is a reason for this silence. The liberationists know that *the Mosaic law was overwhelmingly on the side of private property and hostile to what we call the welfare state*. Samuel warned the Israelites against ordaining a king.

> And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and

> your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day (I Sam 8:14–18).[15]

The modern state taxes at least four times higher than what the tyrannical king would tax. The liberationists condemn the modern state for not taxing and spending even more. So, they do not want their followers to go to the Mosaic law in search of the specifics of economic oppression. The Mosaic law identifies the main oppressors as rulers who misuse the authority of the courts to defraud residents.

Conclusion

The modern Christian world has been deceived by pastors and theologians who are wolves in sheep's clothing. Their self-appointed task is to move Christian opinion in the direction of the humanist political Left. They have done this by selectively quoting from the prophets and then interpreting them by means of the humanist Left's political agenda. They ask this: **What Would Jesus Steal?** In the name of love, they recommend the creation of a welfare state that extracts four times to six times more than the tithe. Samuel warned Israel against a king, for the king would extract 10% of their production. Modern liberation theologians and Social Gospel promoters would regard such a king as a Right-wing Judas, who would reduce taxes on the rich by at least 75%. They would dismiss such a king as a front man for the Right, a king who would oppress the poor by imposing a flat tax.

When you hear a call for "the economics of love," start looking for the hidden gun. Christian love in this context can only be achieved through armed agents of the state showing up at men's doors to demand a large portion of their income—all in the name of justice. Ask yourself these three questions:

1. Where is the gun?
2. Who is holding the gun?
3. At whom is the gun pointed?

The commandment is this: "Thou shalt not steal." It is not this: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

15. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary of the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

INTRODUCTION

Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord *of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the* Lord *of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the* Lord *of hosts: But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate.*

ZECHARIAH 7:12–14

Here, Zechariah surveyed the history of what had happened to Israel and Judah. He was a prophet of the post-exilic period, which began after Cyrus, the Medo-Persian king, allowed the Israelites to return to the Promised Land. His decree was issued around 536 B.C.

A. Prophetic Theme

The pre-exilic prophets had warned the inhabitants of Israel and Judah of the captivity to come. Isaiah was so specific that, two centuries before Cyrus's decree, Isaiah mentioned him by name (Isa. 44:28–45:1). The captivity would be the culmination of a long series of negative corporate sanctions imposed by God because of the Israelites' disobedience. These sanctions were part of what theologians call a covenant lawsuit.

The heart of Old Covenant prophecy was the covenant lawsuit. Predictions were a subordinate aspect of the covenant lawsuit. Predictions came in two forms: first, an *if…then* ethically conditional prediction; second, a specific and unconditional prediction.

A covenant lawsuit was a warning made by a person who had been called by God to warn the nation. If the nation continued to rebel against God by breaking the statutes of the Mosaic law, God would bring corporate negative sanctions against the nation. Some law-

suits were brought against Judah, the southern kingdom. Some were brought against Israel, the northern kingdom. Some were brought against both. Some were brought against nations outside the Promised Land: Jonah's ministry.

The covenant lawsuit rested on the five points of the biblical covenant: (1) the transcendence/presence of God, (2) the hierarchical structure of covenantal institutions, (3) the law of God, (4) the oath to God, and (5) the inheritance of all things by covenant-keepers.[1] In terms of the covenant lawsuits, the prophets affirmed the following: (1) the sovereignty of God over history, (2) the subordination of Israel to God, (3) the Mosaic law, (4) God's positive and negative corporate sanctions in history, and (5) the restoration of Israel as a nation.

It is common to refer to two classifications of prophets: major prophets and minor prophets. This is a conceptual error. It leads to additional errors. One of the worst of these errors is to regard Zechariah as a minor prophet. We should instead classify the ministries of the prophets in terms of their relation to the two captivities: exile from the land.

B. The Exile

Israel's captivity began in 722 B.C. Israel fell to Assyria, which in turn fell to Babylon in 612 B.C. Judah's captivity began in 586 B.C. Judah fell to Babylon, which in turn fell to the Medo-Persians in 539 B.C. The Medo-Persian empire allowed the Israelites to return to Israel in 536 B.C. One group of prophets we can call pre-exilic. The other group we can call post-exilic.

Zechariah was a post-exilic prophet. He preached to those few Israelites who had decided to return from what had been the kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon, which had carried their parents into captivity. As a post-exilic prophet, he offered a message of hope. He did not come before the nation, as the pre-exilic prophets had, with a message of imminent or potentially imminent doom. He came with this message: if they obeyed God's law, as revealed by Moses, the land would prosper. He came with a message of repentance.

As he made clear, his predecessors had also come with that message. They had encountered stiff-necked resistance. "Yea, they made

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992). Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010).

their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law." The Torah, revealed by God to Moses, and revealed by Moses to the exodus generation (Ex. 20–23) and then, four decades later, to the generation of the conquest (Deuteronomy), was binding. It had been clear on this point: a future generation would rebel against God by breaking His law. God would bring comprehensive negative sanctions against them (Deut. 28:15–66), culminating in their forced captivity abroad. Moses had prophesied this.

> Even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt: For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them: And the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book: And the LORD rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day (Deut. 29:24–28).

The pre-exilic prophets came before Israel to call the nation to repentance. Repentance meant invoking God alone as their redeemer, and then obeying the Mosaic law as a sign of their covenantal subordination. The Israelites refused to do either. "Therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 7:12b).

The pre-exilic prophets brought a covenant lawsuit against Israel and Judah. They warned their listeners of the comprehensive negative sanctions to come. These sanctions had been described in the Torah. They had accompanied the statutes. *Without sanctions, there is no law. Without law and sanctions, there is no covenant*.

The post-exilic prophets were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. They also brought a covenant lawsuit. But theirs was different. The negative corporate sanctions had already been applied by God. To escape them, and then to gain comprehensive positive sanctions, the people had to repent. During the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah, they did. The manifestation of their repentance was their completion of the temple, which had sat in ruins for a dozen years or more.

Any attempt to understand the prophets apart from the Mosaic law and its sanctions is doomed to failure. Any attempt to build an economic system in theory and practice in terms of the message of the prophets, without also adopting the Mosaic statutes and sanctions which they invoked, is equally doomed to failure.

Conclusion

The prophets called their listeners to repentance. This repentance would have corporate consequences: *the extension of the kingdom of God in history*. The fruits of repentance were not limited to hearts and souls. They were not limited to families and centers of worship. They were no more limited than sin's domain is limited, and no less limited.

As surely as sinning in Israel and Judah led to captivity—the visible contraction of the kingdom of God in history—so would repentance reverse this contraction and lead to dominion. This had been the message of the pre-exilic prophets, beginning with the greatest of the Old Covenant prophets, Moses.[2] This was also the message of the post-exilic prophets.

2. "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10).

ISAIAH

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

ISAIAH 1:1

Isaiah identified the era in which he served as a prophet. This was a long period of service. King Uzziah's reign was a long one, over half a century. He died sometime around 740 B.C. Hezekiah's reign ended with his death in 687 B.C.

We are not sure when in Uzziah's reign Isaiah's prophetic ministry began. It must have been late. We do know that Isaiah lived until at least 15 years before Hezekiah's death. The prophet told him that God would give the king another 15 years of life. Isaiah 39 records this revelation. The remaining 27 chapters provide additional prophecies, so he lived for years after this meeting.

Isaiah included far more material related to economics than the other prophets did. I have identified 15 passages. The largest number in any other prophet's book is three. The book of Isaiah is long—the second longest book in the Bible after Psalms. So, as a percentage of the book, his comments on economics are minimal.

This is typical of the prophets. They did not pay much attention to economic sins.

1

THE REMNANT

Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

ISAIAH 1:7

A. Continuing Prophetic Theme

The theocentric issue here is inheritance in history: point five of the biblical covenant.[1] The remnant of Israel would persevere through time. The remnant of Israel is a recurring theme in the writings of the prophets. This remnant is sometimes a remnant of righteous covenant-keepers within a society of covenant-breakers. In other cases, it refers to a small number as such, such as Isaiah's prophecy regarding the return of a relatively small number of Israelites to the land after the Babylonian captivity. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness" (Isa. 10:20–22).

At the beginning of his book, Isaiah referred to a saving remnant. It was not large enough to transform Israelite society, but it had a

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

representative judicial function. Because of its presence in the land, God would not destroy the nation in the way that He had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. This remnant had the same judicial function as the hypothetical remnant in Sodom would have had as a result of Abraham's bargaining with the angelic representatives of God to spare the city for the sake of a remnant as few as 10 people (Gen. 18:23–32).

Elijah had not known of the existence of this remnant when he fled from Ahab and Jezebel. God spoke to him while he was hiding in a cave in the wilderness. God asked him why he was there. Elijah lamented, "I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (I Kings 19:14). He saw himself as the last man standing. God informed him that he was incorrect. "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (I Kings 19:18). On account of them, God did not allow the nation to be carried off in Elijah's era. But time eventually ran out for the nation.

B. For the Sake of the Few

The scriptural principle of the saving remnant applies to all of history. Covenant-keepers have usually been outnumbered. They may be sufficiently numerous to have influence in a particular society and era, or they may not. God recognizes that whenever His remnant is small, it therefore deserves protection. He deals with this remnant in a special way. This applied to Israel among the nations. Moses said:

> For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deut. 7:6–8).

This special arrangement also applied to the covenantally faithful remnant within the nation, after the nation had apostatized.

Because the remnant is small, the members' individual productivity does not account for very much most of the time. To remain pro-

ductive, they require an extensive division of labor within the context of a much larger society. The skills and efforts of many people result in high output per capita. The remnant participates in a social order that benefits from voluntary exchange. They are richer as individuals because of the division of labor. This was Lot's situation until the angels led him out of Sodom just before the destruction of the city (Gen. 19).

The doctrine of common grace rests on the assumption that God gives grace—unmerited blessings—in history to covenant-breakers, so that they might provide the historical framework for the development of the rival covenants, God's and Satan's. This common grace heals, but it does not provide entrance into the kingdom of God in history and thereby in eternity.[2] The crucial verse in the Bible regarding common grace is this one: "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (I Tim. 4:10).[3] *Specially* is the key word. God saves some people generally, in the sense of preservation; others He saves specially, in the sense of redemption.

C. Salt and Light

Jesus referred to covenant-keepers as salt and light. "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men" (Matt. 5:13).[4] The remnant serves as salt in the sense of a means of preservation. But salt also destroys.

> And Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them. And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt (Jdgs. 9:44–45).

The remnant possesses both of these attributes of salt. The remnant's presence brings God's preserving grace to the general society, yet His presence also condemns the society by comparison. Cove-

2. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

3. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

4. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 5.

nant-breakers perceive this threat. They reject the remnant's testimony. "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?" (II Cor. 2:15–16).

God administers His transforming grace for the sake of the remnant and also through the remnant. All of history moves toward the final judgment, when the remnant inherits the accumulated capital of human history. Psalm 37 emphasizes this theme.

> For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:9–11).

> Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off (Ps. 37:34–38).

Solomon put it succinctly. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).[5] The remnant inherits in eternity. These texts are clear: *the remnant also inherits in history*. The sanctifying presence of the remnant leads to its inheritance in history.

D. The Remnant Becomes the Majority

The message of Isaiah was that the remnant will not remain the remnant permanently. There will come a time when it becomes the dominant force in society. He ended his book with a description of this triumph.

> For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

> sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them (Isa. 65:17–21).[6]

The sinner will die young at age one hundred. The covenant-keeper will live far longer. This cannot possibly refer to eternity. It refers to history. This is the long-run vision of Isaiah. It offers hope to the remnant through the ages. The remnant's work is cumulative. It expands. The result will be comprehensive inheritance in history.

Conclusion

The remnant was the reason for God's preservation of Israel in the land. But this preservation was temporary. Captivity was coming.

Isaiah presented the sovereignty of God. This is made clear in Isaiah 44 and 45, where he prophesied regarding the restoration of Israel to the land, specifically naming King Cyrus the Medo-Persian, two centuries in advance. "That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Isa. 44:28). The context of this sovereignty provides the meaning of the remnant. Its work perseveres through history through covenantal succession. "Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time" (Isa. 60:21–22).

Faith in linear history, faith in compound growth, and faith in the absolute sovereignty of God over both history and growth: these constitute the confession of the remnant.

These three concepts lead to a society that experiences long-term economic growth. Without the first two, people will not save at high rates. They do not trust the future. The third intensifies men's commitment to the future.

The West has been committed to the first belief ever since it became Christian. It has come to accept the second, beginning in the seventeenth century: Puritan and Presbyterian postmillennialism, a view of time that was secularized by the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. The third belief has been limited to Augustinians and Calvinists, which have been minority positions in their respective ecclesiastical traditions.

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6. Chapter 15.

2

RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

ISAIAH 1:16–17

A. National Repentance

The theocentric issue here is judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] God, through Isaiah, listed these ethical requirements as part of a program of national repentance. God said that He would not tolerate their formal acts of sacrifice unless they reform their ways. He directed His commands first to the nation's rulers, who represented the nation. Immediately thereafter, He targeted the common people. No one was immune.

> Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

> forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood (vv. 10–15).

Isaiah's contemporary, Micah, made a similar challenge to Judah.

> Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God (Micah 6:6–8).

B. Judicial Context

The focus of the passage is on the nature of righteousness. After warning his listeners that acts of formal sacrifice carry no independent weight with God, Isaiah invoked the language of cleanliness. "Wash you, make you clean." In the context of the Mosaic law, this refers to ritual washings. But God had already made it clear that He was not impressed with their ritual obedience. He was interested in their ethics. "Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil. Learn to do well." But how? "Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." These are judicial matters.

This warning was aimed at the rulers of the two nations. Rulers are in charge of the judicial institutions of society. In the remainder of the chapter, Isaiah listed specific infractions of the rulers. They were corrupt to the core. The mark of this corruption was their oppression of the weak.

The Mosaic law identified this test of the law's correct enforcement: protection of widows, orphans, and strangers in the land. There must be honest judgment in the courts. Judgment must never be in terms of persons but always in terms of the application of the Mosaic law to specific cases. The weak are entitled to the same consideration as the rich. This is how God judges. The general rule is here:

> Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour (Lev. 19:15).[2]

The references to the widow, the orphan, and the stranger are here:

> For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward:

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 14.

> He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment (Deut. 10:17–18).
>
> Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge (Deut. 24:17).
>
> When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands (Deut. 24:19).[3]
>
> Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut. 27:19).

These rules applied to civil courts and Levitical courts. Each covenantal institution had its own courts. Each court system was bound by the general rule of law enforcement: no respect of persons.

> Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it (Deut. 1:17).[4]
>
> Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee (Deut. 16:18–20).[5]

It is clear from Isaiah's accusation against the rulers that they had been violating this rule. "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them" (v. 23).

C. Misinterpreting This Passage

There is a tradition of biblical interpretation that is associated with the Social Gospel movement of the twentieth century,[6] which pres-

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 62.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 39.

6. Gregg Singer, *The Unholy Alliance* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1975).

ents the prophets as advocates of wealth redistribution from the rich to the poor. Whenever the words appear regarding oppression, the Social Gospel expositors interpret this as oppression by the rich and powerful through the market economy.

To make this interpretation, they are forced to ignore the most fundamental principle of biblical civil justice: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour" (Lev. 19:15). The expositors do not merely ignore it; they implicitly deny it. Both socialism and welfare state economics rest on a violation of this law.[7] Because their principle of interpretation is so clearly a violation of Leviticus 19:15, the expositors prefer to ignore the passage.

The judicial issue for Isaiah's covenant lawsuit was corrupt judgment in favor of oppressors. The use of the courts to oppress people had angered God. The essence of oppression in the Old Testament was the misuse of the law enforcement system to favor one group against another. The law identified widows, orphans, and strangers as the most vulnerable of residents in the land. They were representatives of the oppressed. When these people were being oppressed, the court system had become corrupt and therefore subject to God's corporate negative sanctions.

Socialism and the welfare state indulge in this same sin, but in the name of the oppressed. Leviticus 19:15 is clear: neither the poor nor the mighty are to be oppressed by the law enforcement system. In both cases, the state has become the oppressor.

Conclusion

The essence of oppression under the Mosaic law was the use of the courts to favor one person or pressure group over another. The context of the Mosaic law's prohibition of oppression was the justice system.

When Isaiah came before the rulers and the people, he singled out the rulers as corrupt. He warned them that their repentance would require a turnaround from their misuse of the courts to oppress the weakest members of society.

Repentance for the prophets was not primarily personal. It was corporate. The prophets did not come before individuals and tell

7. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 14.

them to stop doing evil things. They came before the entire society and told them all that they were corrupt. *The supreme mark of their corruption was injustice in the courts*.

The Social Gospel/liberation theology advocates are correct in their discussions of the prophets as reformers. *The prophets were above all judicial reformers*. But the reform they called for was a return to the Mosaic law. The Social Gospel/liberation theology advocates deny that this is legitimate in the New Testament era. So, in the name of judicial reform, they advocate either full socialism or the welfare state. They cannot find either system in the prophets or the Mosaic law. On the contrary, the Mosaic law affirms a private property social order that is the antithesis of both socialism and the welfare state. There was no central economic planning by the state possible in the decentralized social and legal order of the Mosaic law.

The prophets were neither defenders of pietism—souls-only redemption—nor the welfare state. They were defenders of God's specially revealed law: the Torah. They called for national repentance and national judicial reform. For pietists and liberationists to invoke the prophets in their respective programs of reform is illegitimate until they show exegetically how the prophets' call for a return to the specifics of the Mosaic law can be conformed to the agenda of either pietism or liberationism. The pietists reject the Social Gospel, and the liberationists reject pietism. They cannot both be correct. But they can both be wrong, and are.

3

DEBASEMENT AND ITS EFFECTS

Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water.

ISAIAH 1:22

A. A Conditional Prophecy

The theocentric issue here is obedience to God's law: point three of the biblical covenant.[1] But it is related to the law prohibiting false weights and measures, which was symbolic of honest judgment: point four.[2] The Book of Isaiah begins with a warning: Israel has rebelled against God. This is a prophecy against Israel. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (1:3). Yet Isaiah did not mention the northern kingdom. He referred to "the faithful city," which has to be Jerusalem, a city of Judah, the southern kingdom. So, the prophecy has to be regarded as one that encompasses both kingdoms, Israel and Judah.

Isaiah's prophecy was conditional. It has the characteristic feature of offering a way of escape from the negative corporate sanctions to come. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it" (vv. 19–20).

He began with a brief summary of the origin of Jerusalem's plight. "How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment;

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

2. Sutton, ch. 4; North, ch. 4.

righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers" (v. 21). This points to *judicial corruption*. Isaiah described a process of debasement in history, with disastrous results. First, there was moral decline: an increase of harlotry. Over a century later, Jeremiah used harlotry as a metaphor for religious idolatry (Jer. 3). Isaiah did not make this connection. He spoke of harlotry as a sexual practice. Both Israel and Judah had gone from harlotry to injustice. The result of injustice was the corruption of the faithful city, where the Ark of the Covenant resided. The city was now full of murderers. There had been an increase in deadly crimes. The moral order had been corrupted by harlotry; then the judicial system was corrupted; then society faced rising crime. This corruption was, in modern terminology, a package deal.

B. Comprehensive Debasement

This is the background of a very specific condemnation: "Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water" (1:22). What was dross? It was a base metal, meaning a low-cost metal. That which appeared to be genuine, a bar of silver, was in fact not genuine. It was corrupt. It looked valuable on the outside, but inside there was a low-cost metal.

1. Judicial Corruption

This image of debasement was used by the prophets as a metaphor of judicial corruption. This metaphor went back to a linked pair of Solomon's proverbs. "Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness" (Prov. 25:4–5). But most graphic of all was Ezekiel's language, which looked back at the message of Isaiah, after the southern kingdom of Judah had been carried off into captivity by the Babylonians, the conquerors of Assyria, which had carried off several of the tribes of the northern kingdom in 740, about the time of Uzziah's death. So, what Isaiah had prophesied as imminent for Israel had taken place a century and a half before the ministry of Ezekiel began. He described what had taken place to Judah in 686 B.C.

> And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow

> the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I the LORD have poured out my fury upon you (Ezek. 22:17–22).

Dross was for Ezekiel the metaphor of God's wrath. God had just done to Judah what the rulers of Judah and Israel had done to the system of civil justice. They had debased civil justice; so, God debased the nation's social order. Rich and poor, powerful and helpless, good and evil: all had been put into the furnace.

It was in the lifetime of Ezekiel that the invention of the coin took place in Lydia in Western Asia Minor. Small, round tokens of gold, silver, and a mixture of the two called electrum came into circulation in the second half of the seventh century. The date is commonly estimated as 660 B.C., a quarter century after the Babylonian conquest of Judah.

Verse 22 points to the "drossification" of silver. This could refer to silver in general, or it may have been limited to the monetary unit. In either case, *the legal issue was fraud by deception*. That which was debased was circulating as something valuable. This produced analogous results. The wine was mixed with water. The debasement of silver, the metal of honesty and trade, had led to the debasement of a representative consumer good. Why? Because monetary inflation is based on deception. This deception then becomes universal as prices rise. Producers cut corners. The illusion of high quality products is maintained, just as the illusion of high quality money is maintained. In the modern phrase, "what you see is what you get," no longer applied. What men saw was not what they got. They knew this, which was why Isaiah used the metaphor of dross. He knew they would recognize the connection.

In the passage immediately following this one, Isaiah extends his condemnation to the judicial system. "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them" (v. 23). There should be no doubt that the primary targets of his condemnation were the civil rulers. He is calling on them to repent: to turn around.

So, he begins with the judicial system in verse 21, moves to the monetary system in verse 22, and returns to the judicial system in

verse 23. We should therefore interpret verse 22 as pertaining to civil justice. Yet to ignore the harlotry in verse 21 and the monetary practice in verse 22 would miss the point. Isaiah's condemnation would have made metaphorical sense to his listeners only if it was accurate historically. Harlotry really was widespread in Jerusalem. So was monetary debasement. So was product debasement.

2. Judgment as Fire

After summarizing the moral, judicial, social, monetary, and economic condition of the holy city, he offers a warning. This warning invoked the metaphor of the metal foundry's fire.

> Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city (vv. 24–26).

God's negative corporate sanctions in history are consistent with society's acts of rebellion. The extent of this debasement is universal, Isaiah said. Debasement encompasses sexual morality, judicial practice, criminal behavior, monetary policy, and economic production. But the sin went deeper: idolatry. "And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with sticks" (Jer. 3:9). With stones and sticks they had constructed idols. This was the ultimate debasement. Isaiah warned both nations that God's negative corporate sanction—captivity—will match this supreme debasement: idolatry. This sanction was imminent for the northern kingdom.

The southern kingdom did not learn from the experience of the northern kingdom. Jeremiah reminded them over a century later:

> The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also (Jer. 3:6–8).

C. Monetary Inflation as Debasement

"Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water." This twofold description of debasement could be interpreted as two separate, unrelated conditions. But Isaiah had just argued systematically for a causal relationship among harlotry, judicial corruption, and murder. Why would he switch at this point to identify two additional yet unrelated aspects of Israelite society? The closeness of the description in this verse indicates that it is a single process. But how? What has silver got to do with wine?

Debasement is a form of counterfeiting. The public expects the number of currency units to be limited in circulation. Only if there are exports of goods and services to foreign countries should there be an increase in the number of currency units in the domestic economy, unless someone has discovered a gold or silver mine. So, people bid for goods and services on the assumption of a relatively stable currency.

Then a counterfeiter finds a way to increase his purchase of goods by means of spending newly created money. It is cheaper for him to create these monetary units than it is for him to earn them by producing something of value. These new currency units look like all the others, but they are not the same. They are more plentiful because they contain base metals.

As they circulate, prices of goods and services begin to rise slightly. The counterfeiter buys at yesterday's prices. But as more counterfeiters enter the markets with newly created money, prices rise more rapidly. People on fixed incomes are hurt. They must pay more for what they buy. Those who get early access to the new currency units buy cheaper than those who get access late. Wealth is transferred from some groups to other groups.

As the counterfeiting process continues, more and more people lose confidence in the value of domestic money. They search for ways to hedge against price inflation. They go into debt, so as to pay off loans with cheaper money. Lenders then seek to protect themselves by raising long-term interest rates.

As prices rise, sellers of goods seek to keep ahead of rising costs. But rising prices may meet resistance from buyers. So, sellers imitate the counterfeiters. They reduce the quality of their goods. They use cheaper inputs. They cut costs by cutting corners. Their goods look the same, just as the monetary units look the same. A debasement process spreads to the manufacturing sector.

This is what happened in Israel in Isaiah's time. Cheating through debasement had become a way of life. What looks like a high-quality item is in fact a lower-quality item. It is debasement through deception. On the surface, things appear to be the same. In reality, things are not the same.

D. Corrupt Rulers

Isaiah's focus was moral and judicial. He began with a consideration of harlotry. Then he moved to civil law. Then he moved to social chaos: murderers. Only then did he take up the issue of product debasement. Then he returned to civil law. "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them" (v. 23).

The decline was first manifested in sexual debauchery. Then it moved to politics. Then it moved to economics. What began as a personal sin spread to the rest of society. The acceptance of harlotry by the general public corrupted the rulers. The public turned a blind eye to sin within the gates. Then the rulers indulged themselves, for they were in a position to gain what they wanted because they possessed power.

Isaiah said that the princes are profiting from the corruption of civil law. They seek bribes. They are offered bribes. The text does not say that the government debased the silver. It does not identify the source of the debasing. What is clear from the passage is that the civil government did nothing to stop it. It allowed false weights and measures. This is the essence of judicial sin, as the Mosaic law stated.

> Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt (Lev. 19:35–36).[3]

> Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God (Deut. 25:13–16).[4]

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3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 19.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

Solomon returned to this theme. "Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 20:10).[5] "Divers weights are an abomination unto the Lord; and a false balance is not good" (Prov. 20:23). The mark of righteous government is constancy in weights and measures.

> A divine sentence is in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment. A just weight and balance are the Lord's: all the weights of the bag are his work. It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness (Prov. 16:10–12).[6]

Isaiah came before the nation and pointed to the evidence of widespread corruption in society. This evidence was as close at hand as the money used in transactions. The monetary unit testified against the nation, but above all, the rulers. The rulers had consented to the debasement of weights and measures. As the law in Leviticus warned, unrighteousness in judgment would be reflected in false weighs and measures.

In most societies, the state has insisted on a monopoly of money creation. This is justified in the name of honest money. Counterfeiting is illegal. The civil government is pictured as beyond temptation. Yet, with only the exception of the Byzantine empire (325–1453), all civil governments have corrupted the currency. They have sought to spend more money than they collect in taxes or borrow. All national currency units end up debased. Civil governments can no more resist the short-run benefits of monetary debasement than private counterfeiters can. No one can prosecute the civil government for fraud.

Civil governments should declare the legal standard—weight and fineness—for coins acceptable for the payment of taxes, including warehouse receipts to coins. Then the civil government should open the market to all producers of coins or issuers of warehouse receipts. The state should prosecute those producers of coins or bullion who debase the various private currency units. Producers would also have an incentive to monitor each other's production, reporting to the civil authorities every known infraction by a rival. The cost of policing the monetary unit would be decentralized and overwhelmingly privatized.

This procedure would apply to all banks. No bank would be allowed to issue more warehouse receipts for deposited precious metal coins or bullion than it has in reserve. Banks would profit from stor-

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 57.

6. *Ibid*., ch. 52.

age fees and other services. They would not profit by lending warehouse receipts for precious metals that they did not have in storage. Second, no bank would be allowed to lend money for any period of time unless the depositor has surrendered in writing his legal right to withdraw his funds on demand during this loan period. This is 100% reserve banking—no counterfeiting.[7] This is how the Bank of Amsterdam operated for 170 years, 1609–1780.[8]

Civil rulers want to be able to debase the nation's coinage so as to increase spending without raising visible taxes. They also want banks to buy government debt. So, they retain a monopoly over the coinage, so as to monopolize counterfeiting. Second, they legalize fractional reserve commercial banking. Third, they grant to a national central bank a monopoly over money creation by commercial banks. This agency promises commercial bankers to protect them from bank runs by depositors, and it promises the government to "make a market" for the government's debt, i.e., buy the debt with newly created fiat money. Banks are allowed to operate in terms of fractional reserves: issuing promises to pay gold coins on demand, when in fact all deposers cannot redeem these promises on the same day because there are insufficient reserves. The result is monetary inflation, then price inflation, and then the boom-bust business cycle.[9]

Conclusion

Isaiah was clear: Israel's civil government was corrupt. The rulers had followed a path to moral corruption personally. Then they compromised with criminals. By Isaiah's day, the corruption was universal. The rulers had even debased the money supply. By fostering debased money, judicial corruption had also fostered debased quality standards governing production. Quality was declining because prior quality standards were no longer being honored. Private producers had begun to cut corners. Israel was foreshadowing the economy of the Soviet Union, in which this slogan was familiar: "The government pretends to pay us, and we pretend to work."

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7. Murray N. Rothbard, "The Case for a 100% Gold Dollar," in Leland B. Yeager (ed.), *In Search of a Monetary Constitution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 94–136.

8. Jesús Huerta de Soto, *Money, Bank Credit, and Economic Cycles* (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, [2002] 2006), pp. 98–106.

9. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), chaps. 19, 20. Murray N. Rothbard, *What Has Government Done to Our Money?* (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, [1964] 2010).

Isaiah warned that God would bring corporate negative sanctions in response to this corruption. The symbol of these sanctions was the metal worker's furnace. "I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin." The historical form would be captivity: the northern kingdom fell to Assyria; the southern kingdom fell to Babylon. This followed God's warning, given through Moses. "Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity" (Deut. 28:41). After the return to the land by a small remnant, they would be ruled by foreign empires. That, too, had been promised by God.

> The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail. Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee: And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever (Deut. 28:43–46).[10]

10. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 70.

4

PROSPERITY WITH IDOLS

> *Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers. Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots. Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made. And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not.*
>
> ISAIAH 2:6–8

A. Covenant Lawsuit

The theocentric issue here was idolatry, a false hierarchy. Hierarchy is point two of the biblical covenant.[1] Isaiah here speaks to God in the presence of listeners. He acted as an intermediary: a representative of God. This description of the condition of the nation is an introduction to his lengthy condemnation of the nation. He gives them fair warning.

> Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low (vv. 10–12).

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

Negative corporate sanctions are coming, he says. These sanctions will disabuse them of their trust in themselves and in their idols.

> And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols he shall utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth (vv. 17–21).

The nation was so rich that individuals could afford to make household idols out of precious metals. Although these idols were seen as gateways or mediators to supernatural forces, they declared the co-sovereignty of man, for it was men who made these idols. "They worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made." So, Isaiah ends this prophecy with a phrase that has been cited for generations. "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of" (v. 22)?

B. Covenant-Breaking Prosperity

Isaiah makes clear the covenantal foundations of Israel's prosperity: covenant-breaking. First, the land is filled with idols. These were not idols built by the governments of Israel, civil and ecclesiastical. Uzziah was generally a righteous king (II Kings 15:34). So was his son (II Chron. 26:4). So, these idols are household idols. These households had gold and silver to decorate the works of their hands.

Second, "their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots." Horses and chariots were prohibited to kings by the Mosaic law (Deut. 17:16).[2] These were offensive weapons. The kings were not to accumulate such weapons.

The text does not reveal whether Uzziah obeyed these restrictions, but it is likely that he did not. Solomon had disobeyed them with a vengeance. "And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem" (I Kings 10:26). Jehosophat had gone to war

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 42.

against Syria alongside Ahab, who was mortally wounded in his chariot (I Kings 22:34).

Josiah was the first king after Solomon who is said to have self-consciously obeyed the law in this regard. "And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire" (II Kings 23:11). His kingship was late. Judah fell to Babylon about 23 years after his death.

There were no restrictions in the Mosaic law regarding the private ownership of these weapons. Here, we see a unique aspect of the Mosaic law. Citizens, tribes, cities, and even strangers were allowed to possess weaponry that the king, as the nation's commander of God's holy army, was not allowed to own.[3] This was another aspect of the decentralized political order under the Mosaic law.

In his prophecy regarding God's corporate negative sanctions, Isaiah did not say that the chariots will be abandoned by fearful covenant-breakers. Idols will be abandoned; chariots are not mentioned. It is clear from the text that privately owned horses and chariots will not protect the Israelites from captivity. Nothing will protect them. Isaiah cried out to God, "therefore forgive them not." God hearkened to Isaiah's prayer.

Horses and chariots were expensive. If individuals had bought them, then there was great wealth in the nation.

Conclusion

The text indicates that the two nations' wealth was dispersed widely. So were idols. This indicates that covenant-breaking does not lead to negative corporate sanctions overnight. It takes generations of economic growth to accumulate great per capita wealth. But the sanctions eventually come. Isaiah reminded his listeners of this fact immediately following his description of the wealth of the two nations. This wealth would be cut off by God. This came true for Israel within two decades of the beginning of Isaiah's ministry, meaning during his ministry. The northern kingdom went into captivity to Assyria in 722 B.C. This was not true of Judah. Isaiah's early years of ministry took place over a century and a half before Judah fell to Babylon in 586 B.C.

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3. The Mosaic law was silent with respect to privately owned weapons. The general principle of the Mosaic law was analogous to the law in Eden: that which was not explicitly prohibited by law or a principle of the law was legal.

5

CONSEQUENCES OF OPPRESSION

> *For, behold, the Lord, the* Lord *of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water.*
>
> ISAIAH 3:1

The threocentric issue here was God's judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] This was a prophecy. The captivity of Jerusalem did not come until 586 B.C., well over a century after Isaiah spoke these words. But, in between Isaiah's day and the arrival of the Babylonians, the southern kingdom experienced a downward drift morally, as covenant-breaking became a way of life. Not even Josiah's three-decade righteous reign reversed this drift.

A. Inverted Judicial Hierarchy

The preliminary mark of God's corporate negative sanction of captivity was an inversion of the judicial hierarchy.[2] "And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them" (v. 4). In the case of Josiah, who became king at age eight, this was a great advance. His reign had been prophesied over three centuries earlier by an unnamed prophet in the days of Jeroboam, the king who rebelled against Solomon's son Rehoboam. Jeroboam set up a rival altar in the northern kingdom. There would be negative consequences, the prophet warned.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory,* 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Sutton, ch. 2; North, ch. 2.

> And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out (I Kings 13:1–3).

This prophecy was fulfilled literally almost 350 years later.

> Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that were on high above them, he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strowed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem (II Chron. 34:1–5).

Prior to Josiah's reign, there would be a series of corrupt rulers. These rulers would reflect a social inversion which would be considered a curse. The social inversion would be a consequence of the moral inversion. "And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable" (Isa. 3:5).

B. Judicial Oppression

The text provides neither a judicial nor a moral definition of oppression. It also does not describe the specifics. Thus, we are left with only the Mosaic law as the source of our definition. This is not a liability. The Mosaic law was what the prophets invoked as the basis of their covenant lawsuits brought against Israel and Judah.

Oppression in the Mosaic law was marked by the misuse of the civil law. Corrupt rulers and corrupt citizens of the holy commonwealth used the civil government to gain unfair advantages over their neighbors. They refused to enforce the Mosaic law.

The negative model was Egypt. God told Moses, "Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them" (Ex. 3:9). God delivered the Israelites from Egypt. In the process, He killed Egypt's firstborn sons, delivered their inheritance to the Israelites, and destroyed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. When God revealed the details of the Mosaic law through Moses a few weeks later,[3] he used Egypt as the negative model: "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 22:21).[4] The focus was exclusively judicial.

> Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause. Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked. And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous. Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt (Ex. 23:6–9).[5]

So, the essence of oppression in Mosaic Israel was the refusal of the judges to enforce the whole of the Mosaic law, including its specific negative sanctions. Thus, the prophets came before the people and their rulers in the name of the Mosaic law. They brought a series of covenant lawsuits against the two kingdoms. They warned of negative corporate sanctions which were inescapable unless the people repented.

C. Consequences

These negative sanctions manifested the predictable, consistent relationship between covenant-keeping and outward success, and covenant-breaking and outward failure (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). So, God told Isaiah to bring this message. "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (vv. 10–11).

The primary problem was the nation's leadership. This leadership caused the people to sin. "As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead

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3. A common opinion of commentators is that the giving of the law took place 50 days after Passover.

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

5. *Ibid*., ch. 52.

thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths" (v. 12). With greater power comes greater responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).[6] Thus will come greater punishment.

> The LORD standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people. The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof: for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord GOD of hosts (vv. 13–15).

The princes—civil rulers—and the ancients, who were influential, are using their positions of authority to steal from the people, including the poor. God will not tolerate this indefinitely, Isaiah warns.

There is no question that the oppression was economic. The question is: How was this possible? The answer was simple: *a failure to enforce the Mosaic law*. But how had this taken place? Because of widespread sin in the broadest sense. "The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves" (v. 9).

Isaiah then identified the signs of the nation's sin: delicate, haughty women. He presented a list of practices that are an affront to God: sexual provocation, jewels, and high fashion. God will replace their beauty and finery with sickness (vv. 16–24). They will no longer be protected by their men. "Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war" (v. 25). Jerusalem, spoken of as female, will suffer the consequences; "And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground" (v. 26).

There was nothing new in Isaiah's message. Moses had presented the system of covenantal causation seven centuries earlier. It was highly specific.

> The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, And toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates (Deut. 28:56–57).

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

D. Repentance

Isaiah does not bring a new message to his listeners. He announces that the negative sanctions revealed by Moses were still in operation. The same kinds of negative corporate sanctions that were listed in the Mosaic law would inevitably be applied to Israel and Judah if both the rulers and the people refused to repent. The fact that Isaiah invoked the same negative sanctions testifies to the fact that the required repentance involved a return to the Mosaic law. The civil rulers were required to change their judicial ways. They were required to apply the Mosaic law.

The central event of Josiah's reign was the discovery of the lost scroll of the Mosaic law, recorded in II Kings 22. The king, already a covenant-keeper, immediately recognized what was required by God: national repentance. The mark of this repentance was a restoration of the Mosaic law in the courts, both civil and ecclesiastical, Moses said.

> And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying, Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us (II Kings 22:11–13).

Josiah's reward was that he did not live to see the consequences of a national refusal to repent, despite his leadership.

> Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again (II Kings 22:19–20).

He died in battle a little over two decades before Judah went into captivity in Babylon.

Conclusion

The context of Isaiah's warning against oppression was judicial. His definition of honest dealing was faithfulness in enforcing the terms of the national covenant: the Mosaic law. His definition of oppression was this: the refusal of the rulers to enforce the terms of the national covenant. Because the Mosaic law was not being enforced, it was every man for himself. "And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour" (v. 5a). Rebellion was universal. Repentance therefore had to be universal. It was not enough that the rulers repent. Everyone was required to repent. Otherwise, they would live in universal oppression until the corporate negative sanction came: captivity. This, too, had been part of the Mosaic law. "Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity" (Deut. 28:41). But this would not be captivity unto oblivion. It would be captivity unto restoration, Moses had prophesied.

> And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers (Deut. 30:1–5).[7]

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 72.

6

RESTORING THE JUBILEE

> *What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.*
>
> ISAIAH 5:4–6

The theocentric issue here was God's negative sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] Isaiah spoke in God's name. He spoke as if he were God. The message here is clear: negative corporate sanctions are coming.

A. God's Investments

God had loved Israel. Now He sang a song to the nation, which is elsewhere described as God's son and heir.

> Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes (Isa. 5:1–2).

The language here is that of a husbandman who devotes himself to planting a vineyard. It takes time and capital to plant a vineyard.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

It takes work. The husbandman hopes for domesticated grapes with a specific flavor, color, and texture. In this case, his hopes were thwarted by the vines. He got wild grapes.

As the faithful husbandman, God looked at the fruit of His labors. He found a bad crop. He asked the nation to judge the rightness of His cause. They had enough knowledge of God's law and His character to understand right from wrong.

> And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes (vv. 3–4)?

This was the preliminary announcement of a covenant lawsuit. A covenant lawsuit always invokes the threat of negative sanctions.

> And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it (vv. 5–6).

To maintain a vineyard's productivity, the owner must make constant investments: capital. God announced that He will no longer make these capital investments. The result will be capital depletion: wasted land. But this form of waste is better than the waste of reaping a harvest of wild grapes. This waste will at least conserve economic resources.

God had already done this in man's history. He cursed the ground with thistles and thorns (Gen. 3:17).[2] He ejected Adam and Eve from the garden, cutting them off from the tree of life (Gen. 3:23–24).[3] He had placed them in the garden to care for it and to defend it (Gen. 2:15).[4] They had refused to defend it against the serpent, so He chose to keep them from caring for it. Better to see the garden overrun by the wildness of cursed nature than to allow men to occupy it for evil purposes. Nothing is better than something whenever something is self-consciously wicked.

What was God's point? This: the existence of widespread covenantal rebellion. "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 13.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry" (v. 7). What form did this oppression take? Accumulating land. "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!" (v. 8).

God threatened to fill the vineyards with briers and thorns. He repeated this prophecy (Isa. 7:23–24). While God had placed man on earth to dress it, He was willing to let the land go back to wild nature rather than have it pruned by covenant-breaking Israelites. Better to have cattle keep the hills stripped of briers and thorns (Isa. 7:25) than to have ethically rebellious Israelites carefully prune the land.

B. Violating the Jubilee Land Law

The jubilee land law established a principle of inheritance governing rural land. Every 49 years, the heirs of those families that had faithfully committed genocide against the Canaanites would inherit the land that had been allocated by tribe and by lot: land that was not enclosed by the gates of Canaan's cities (Lev. 25:8–10). The ownership of rural property in Mosaic Israel was based on genocide, and this principle of ownership was not to be violated.

So crucial was genocide to land ownership in Israel that two and a half tribes were not allowed to inherit land which the Israelites had conquered outside the boundaries of the Jordan River until they had fought side by side their brethren to kill everyone inside the boundaries of the Jordan. The Israelites had just annihilated several nations on the far side of the Jordan, but they had not originally done this for the sake of land. Those Canaanite tribes had unwisely initiated war with them, and the Israelites had destroyed them completely. Then the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh decided that they preferred the land outside the Jordan rather than inside. Moses told them this was fine, on one condition: more genocide.

> And Moses said unto them, If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben will pass with you over Jordan, every man armed to battle, before the Lord, and the land shall be subdued before you; then ye shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession: But if they will not pass over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan. And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben answered, saying, As the Lord hath said unto thy servants, so will we do. We will pass over armed before the Lord into the land of Canaan, that the possession of our

> inheritance on this side Jordan may be ours. And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and unto half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, with the cities thereof in the coasts, even the cities of the country round about (Num. 32:29–33).

Land ownership in Mosaic Israel was grounded judicially in covenantal extermination. The exterminators' heirs were required by God's law to honor this covenantal foundation of property rights. The Israelite calendar was governed by the jubilee year. It re-set every 50 years. Year 49 was the jubilee year. "In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession" (Lev. 25:13).[5]

The price of rural land was governed by this return of land to the families of the original owners. As the year of jubilee drew closer, the redemption price of land was reduced. Not to honor this pricing system was specifically designated by the Mosaic law as oppression.

> And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbour, or buyest ought of thy neighbour's hand, ye shall not oppress one another: According to the number of years after the jubile thou shalt buy of thy neighbour, and according unto the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee: According to the multitude of years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years thou shalt diminish the price of it: for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell unto thee. Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the LORD your God. Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and he shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety (Lev. 25:14–19).[6]

This is the background of Isaiah's condemnation of the Israelites. "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry" (Isa. 5:7).[7]

C. Grounded in Genocide

There is an old saying, "I'm not greedy. All I want to own is the land contiguous to mine." That, of course, means that he wants everything, one piece at a time. This was also the goal of successful farmers

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 25.

7. Chapter 6.

in Isaiah's day. They wanted to own their next-door neighbor's land. So, they accumulated land by purchase.

This may sound as though land accumulation is morally wrong. It is nowhere identified as morally wrong in this text. What was morally wrong was the nation's refusal to enforce the jubilee land law. It had become legally possible for high-efficiency farmers to buy the land of their less efficient neighbors. This was a form of oppression. Why? Because it substituted a principle of rural land ownership that was foreign to Mosaic Israel: ownership by efficiency rather than ownership by legacy. The legacy was specific: genocide. God had delivered their enemies into their hand. This was *efficiency of military conquest*.

This was God's testimony down through the generations. He is sovereign. He delegates land to those whom He chooses. He chose the Israelites. He hated the Canaanites, whose deeds were evil. He had instructed His people accordingly. "And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee" (Deut. 7:16).

Deuteronomy 7 records God's very specific instructions to His people regarding the Canaanites. Because sermons are rarely preached on Deuteronomy 7, it is appropriate to reproduce the passage verbatim, for it is unfamiliar to modern Christians. *This passage was the judicial foundation of the jubilee's laws of inheritance.*

> When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.
>
> The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath

> which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.
>
> Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them (Deut. 7:1–11).

As Otto Scott once wrote, God is no buttercup.

The Israelites in Isaiah's day had refused to honor the terms of God's national covenant. The leaders had allowed successful farmers accumulate land based on their efficient production: money to buy out their neighbors. Isaiah correctly designated this policy as oppression.

Once again, I must remind readers that oppression in Mosaic Israel was a judicial concept. It was the policy of refusing to enforce the Mosaic law. The Mosaic law regarding rural land was clear. The heirs of each plot were to inherit their share of the land in year 49. It did not matter how economically inefficient they were. It did not matter how little money they possessed. If they were heirs of the conquest generation, they were to receive their share of the land.

This meant that no family could lawfully accumulate land as an inheritance beyond the jubilee year. To do so, the family had to gain the cooperation of the civil rulers, who would agree not to enforce the jubilee land law. *This was heart of the oppression identified by Isaiah*. Rural land ownership in Mosaic Israel was grounded covenantally in blood: genocide. No other principle of rural land ownership could lawfully be substituted by the rulers.

This is not how other Bible commentators have discussed the jubilee land laws. The underlying principle of the jubilee laws—genocide—is unacceptable to the commentators. So, they search for other reasons for the existence of the laws. They refuse to go to Deuteronomy 7, which embarrasses them.

D. The Annulment of the Jubilee Laws

The reason why the jubilee law no longer applies is because Jesus annulled it in Luke 4. He read from Isaiah 61.

> And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears (Luke 4:17–21).[8]

With the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the Mosaic land laws disappeared forever. Nothing of the old land laws extends into the New Covenant. Why not? Because they were grounded in God's mandatory genocide of the Canaanites. *There is no mandatory genocide in the New Covenant*. So, anyone who suggests that there is some continuing role for the so-called "economic principle of the jubilee year" is necessarily also calling for a return to the genocidal foundation of both rural property ownership and permanent slavery (Lev. 25:44–46).[9] Of course, he would deny any such motivation. He can deny the motivation all he wants, but if he refuses to cease calling for the enforcement of some version of state-mandated redistribution of wealth in the name of the jubilee, he is in effect baptizing New Testament genocide and slavery. He cannot legitimately have it both ways. He must either abandon the so-called economics of the jubilee year or else abandon a world that no longer recognizes the legitimacy of the inheritance of slaves as part of a slave-owning family's legacy to its children.

Conclusion

Isaiah warned his listeners against the sin of refusing to enforce the Mosaic law-order. Such a refusal constituted oppression. He went on to identify the violation of a specific case law: the jubilee land law governing rural property. The rulers had not enforced it. Thus, some families had amassed rural property. "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth (Isa. 5:8)!" Woe also to the rulers who collaborated with these land grabbers.

Without repentance, Isaiah warned, the vineyard known as Israel will lose God's protection. It will be trodden down. It will be invaded.

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

9. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 31.

"Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst" (Isa. 5:13). This took place in the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. It took place in the southern kingdom in 586 B.C. It took place inside the land when it fell to Alexander the Great, and then Rome. Finally, it took place with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Israel did not learn the covenantal lesson, namely, that there are predictable corporate sanctions in history, both positive and negative.

7

JUDICIAL CAUSATION

Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless! And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory?

ISAIAH 10:1–3

The theocentric issue here was God's judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] The Hebrew is not clear in verse 1. The word translated as "write" is the same as the word translated as "prescribed." The New American Standard version translates the phrase as "record unjust decisions." The New English Bible reads "publish burdensome decrees." The sense of the verse is that of a court which declares unjust laws and then publishes them by writing them down, thereby sending a message to future disputants. The message is that injustice reigns in the court. The righteous know in advance that they are expected to submit to unjust rulers and unjust citizens whose causes are favored by unjust rulers.

Isaiah warned such rulers of the consequences: "And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory?" There is an underlying judicial principle being invoked here, one which was clearly stated by Jesus. "For with what judgment ye

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:2).

A. Judicial Cause and Effect

The Mosaic law established a system of negative judicial sanctions: an eye for an eye, also called the *lex talionis*. "And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again" (Lev. 24:19–20). In modern terminology, *the punishment should fit the crime*.

When the civil government of any society refuses to honor this principle, God intervenes to enforce that which the civil government has refused to enforce. He imposes negative sanctions on the entire society. On what judicial basis? This: *the people are responsible for the judicial sins of their rulers*. This principle was set forth in Leviticus 4. The people had to offer atoning sacrifices for the sins of their civil and ecclesiastical rulers.[2]

Modern theology, jurisprudence, ethical theory, and political theory stand forthright against this principle of judicial cause and effect. All deny that God in the New Testament era brings predictable corporate sanctions, positive or negative, in history. They affirm that corporate sanctions in history are endogenous: self-generated. Corporate sanctions are said to have their origin in either nature or society. If sanctions originate in nature, they are not seen as sanctions. They are seen as impersonal and purposeless. If they originate in society, then mankind is seen as autonomous. David described this mindset.

> The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it (Ps. 10:4–11).

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 4.

David had a response to those who believed this.

> Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble. Wherefore doth the wicked contemn [provoke] God? he hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it. Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless. Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man: seek out his wickedness till thou find none (Ps. 10:12–15).

Isaiah here affirmed the reality of the Mosaic law's system of judicial causation. This affirmation rested on David's concept of God's judicial intervention in history. This was true of all of the prophets, including those who brought covenant lawsuits against covenant-breaking nations. Without the *universality of this system of judicial causation*, no prophet could have brought a valid covenant lawsuit to a foreign nation. Jonah's ministry would have made no sense.

Most Christian expositors have asserted or assumed that the system of judicial causation that undergirded the Mosaic Covenant does not operate in the New Covenant era. Yet we also find that contemporary expositors and especially politically liberal Christian political activists invoke the prophets' language regarding judicial causation. They then substitute politically liberal humanist causes for the statutes of the Mosaic law. They insist that Christians have a moral obligation to lobby for this or that political program in the name of Jesus. They cite the language of the prophets, yet they deny the system of judicial causation invoked by the prophets, the specific negative corporate sanctions promised by them, and the specific Mosaic statutes and penalties that undergirded the prophets' covenant lawsuits.[3]

Conclusion

Isaiah warned his listeners about what they could expect. Their rulers had acted unjustly with respect to the poor, to widows, and to orphans. These were the helpless members of society. He told them that God would bring desolation to the nation. There would be no escape.

3. The most flagrant example of this sort of exegesis that I have ever read appeared in *The Alabama Law Review* (Fall 2002): Susan Pace Hamill, "An Argument for Tax Reform Based on Judeo-Christian Ethics," pp. 1–112. Hamill was Professor of Law at the University of Alabama. This article became the basis of a tax reform proposal pushed by the newly elected Republican governor of Alabama, Bob Riley, in 2003. He was a vocal Christian. "Alabama governor calls tax hike Christian duty," *USA Today* (July 30, 2003). The proposal failed when the voters rejected it, two-to-one, in a referendum in September, 2003. "Alabama Voters Crush Tax Plan Sought by Governor," *New York Times* (Sept. 10, 2003).

Predictable sanctions are basic to God's system of *eternal judicial causation*: heaven or hell (Luke 16), followed the New Heavens and New Earth of the resurrection or the lake of fire of the resurrection (Rev. 20:14–15). Covenant-keepers affirm this today. The prophets were unaware of this final judgment. There is an analogous system of *temporal judicial causation*. Most covenant-keepers deny this. The prophets affirmed this.

Christian social theory should incorporate the personal sanctions of eternity and the corporate sanctions of history. So should Christian economic theory. The fact that this still has not happened helps to explain why Christian social theory and Christian economic theory are not Christian. They are unstable hybrid mixtures of humanism and Christianity. "And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" (II Cor. 6:15).

8

MESSIANIC JUSTICE

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

ISAIAH 11:1–4

A. A Messianic Prophecy

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] This is a messianic prophecy. Later in the chapter, we read this: "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious" (v. 10). Paul cited this verse as having been fulfilled by Jesus Christ. "And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust" (Rom. 15:12). So, we know this was a messianic prophecy.

Isaiah says here that the Messiah's concern will be the treatment of the poor by the courts. "He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth." The Hebrew word translated as "reprove" means "to judge." It usually has the connotation of a negative pronouncement, often within the context of a court. The Messiah will judge as a king judges. He is the heir of Jesse, meaning a son of David.

The text does not say that the Messiah will defend the poor and meek. Rather, He will judge them. But He will not judge them by what He hears about them or sees: their weakness. He will judge solely in terms of God's standard of righteousness. This is in stark contrast with the rulers of Isaiah's day. "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them" (Isa. 1:23). The messiah will be on the side of justice.

B. Unfulfilled Prophecies

The following has not been fulfilled in history: "But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." When will this be fulfilled? This question divides the major eschatological positions.

Amillennialists must interpret this prophecy as having to do with the final judgment. From the perspective of amillennialism, this reign of justice cannot ever be fulfilled in history. Christ did not fulfill it. He did not leave Palestine during His earthly ministry. He has not literally reigned over the gentiles. He reigns only spiritually, amillennialists believe. Surely, they argue, the church has never extended earthly justice on this worldwide scale. None of the three major branches of Jesse's branch—Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism—has ever ruled society in such a way that the other two have acknowledged either its legitimacy or its ethical coherence. So, this passage is a problem passage for amillennialism, which denies the eschatological possibility of a comprehensive institutional incorporation of the messianic kingdom in history.

Premillennialists look forward an earthly messianic kingdom which will last a thousand years before the final judgment. Yet we find no premillennial treatises on the details of the judicial system that will be imposed and enforced by Christ and His international civil court system.

Historic premillennialists—mostly Calvinists—do not believe that this messianic kingdom will be in any way related to the Mosaic law's

mandated civil order. So, the legal order represents a major discontinuity separating the Old and New Covenants. They do see judicial continuity between the New Testament church and the future messianic kingdom. But they remain discreetly silent with respect to the judicial principles that will be enforced by civil government in the future kingdom. The medieval church used Roman Stoicism's natural law theory to construct its system of casuistry. So did a handful of Puritan and Anglican pastors in the seventeenth century, most notably Richard Baxter and Jeremy Taylor. Their detailed ethical systems were never widely accepted, let alone enforced, in Protestant churches. So, historic premillennialists are silent on the nature of civil justice in the future kingdom.

In contrast to historic premillennialists, dispensational premillennialist theologians believe that the messianic kingdom will be marked by a restoration of the Mosaic civil law. The discontinuity between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant is emphasized by dispensationalists.[2] I can summarize the position's assessment of judicial theory. "The messianic kingdom will restore much of this lost continuity with the Mosaic era. Just as there was a major discontinuity between the Mosaic Covenant and the Church Age, so will there be a major discontinuity between the Church Age and the messianic kingdom. This discontinuity is so great that it would be a waste of time today to develop the details of the future kingdom. These details have no authoritative, Bible-mandated application in the Church Age. Christians alive at the end of the Church Age will be removed from history by the Rapture, so none of them will be in positions of authority during the messianic kingdom. The world therefore can and should wait for Jesus to implement His preferred legal system in person when He returns to rule the nations. There is no good reason to struggle to develop these details now, as through a glass, darkly, prior to the Rapture." So, there is no dispensational treatise on the broad outlines of the legal system of the messianic kingdom.

There is also no dispensational treatise on Christian social ethics for the Church Age. This is understandable. Because the categories and content of the Mosaic law do not extend into the Church Age, which the major dispensational theologians have insisted is the case, there is no theological basis in the Church Age for identifying one

2. This is less true of the "progressive dispensationalists," who have yet to produce a systematic theology presenting their position. The position was developed in the 1980s. It has not been widely adopted in local churches.

legal order as more legitimate than another, biblically speaking, because the New Testament is silent on such matters. Thus, we have yet to see a single published dispensational book on social ethics. Yet the movement began in 1830.

Historic Presbyterian postmillennialism is tied to the Westminster Confession and the two catechisms (1647), as accepted by Scottish Presbyterianism in 1648. The key passage is the answer to Question 191 in the Larger Catechism: the conversion of the Jews. But the Westminster Confession and the catechisms do not reveal a detailed concern with civil government. What little there was did not survive the American revision of the Confession in 1787, which paralleled the writing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787. The Constitutional Convention began the week following the close of the Presbyterian Synod. Both assemblies were held in Philadelphia. Both documents were ratified by representative regional assemblies in 1787–88. Both documents reflected the natural law doctrines of the Scottish Enlightenment by way of John Witherspoon, who was the spiritual father of both documents, having been Madison's professor at the College of New Jersey (Princeton).[3] The social views of historic postmillennialists were closely tied to nineteenth-century classical liberalism, which was an extension of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment. Their social views were not self-consciously Christian, nor were they grounded in texts from the Bible.

This leaves theonomic postmillennialism as the obvious source of such treatises. And so it has been: the New England Puritans during the first generation (1630–60) and Christian Reconstructionists today.

Conclusion

The prophecy was messianic. It pointed to Jesus Christ, who will serve as judge. This text did not refer to the final judgment. It referred to a restoration of the holy commonwealth after the captivity. "And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt" (Isa. 11:16). This was never fulfilled. So, its fulfillment must still be in the future.

The context of the prophecy was civil justice. This means the content was the Mosaic law. To argue otherwise is to argue that the proph-

3. On the links between the revised Confession and the Constitution, see Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 6. Cf. Gary North, *Conspiracy in Philadelphia* (Draper, Virginia: NiceneCouncil.com, [2004] 2011), ch. 1.

ets called on Israel and Judah to adopt a new law-order. For this, there is no evidence anywhere in the Bible. So, the prophets believed that justice will eventually be enforced in history by the Messiah. Their concept of justice was Mosaic—not Greek, Roman, medieval, Renaissance, or Enlightenment.

The question is: When? Another question is: How? In person? Or representatively by His covenanted people? To what extent will the principles of civil law that governed the prophets also govern during the Messiah's reign? How do the principles of continuity and discontinuity apply? When do they apply? Throughout the entire New Testament era or only in a special future segment of this era: the messianic kingdom? These questions are rarely raised individually. They are almost never raised together. This is because the broad Christian tradition offers no answers to them. Men rarely ask questions that have not been answered for two millennia. They also do not ask questions whose answers will require them to serve as prophet-like men in an era of agnostic skepticism and Christian pietism. This is because responsibility is always a difficult thing to market. Jesus' account of the prophets was clear on this point.

> Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation (Matt. 23:29–36).

It is not this bad for Christians in our day in most nations, although it is in some Islamic societies. But the typical response of covenant-breakers to the Mosaic law is one of disdain or contempt, as is the response of most covenant-keepers. Modern man dismisses God's Bible-revealed laws and then accepts the modern messianic state's laws. He therefore finds himself in bondage.

9

WITHOUT PITY OR PRICE

Every one that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is joined unto them shall fall by the sword. Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished. Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it.

ISAIAH 13:15–17

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] Here, Isaiah prophesied against Babylon. This is a passage that appalls theological liberals. First, it is a prophecy regarding events that were two centuries away. The Babylonian empire will fall to the Medo-Persian empire, Isaiah said. The Medo-Persian empire did not exist at the time of this prophecy. Second, God identified Himself as the source of these corporate negative sanctions, which include the destruction of children.

A. The Ruthlessness of God

War is a period in which normal activities cease to be normative. Because war authorizes violence, the moral standards that prevail in peacetime are suspended by the rulers with regard to the treatment of the enemy. Ruthless acts that would be regarded as pathological in peacetime win medals for their perpetrators during wartime. That which the Bible identifies as immoral becomes commonplace on the battlefield.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

That God would bring such negative sanctions against any nation seems inconceivable to liberals and pietists. Yet He did this during the conquest of Canaan.

> And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them (Deut. 7:2)

> And thou shalt consume all the people which the Lord thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee (Deut. 7:16).

> But the Lord thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed (Deut. 7:23).

This destruction was to be total: annihilation. This was genocide. This destruction was not to be mitigated for the sake of personal gain. Achan discovered this after he hid some of the treasure which he had found in Jericho. The punishment for this was the annihilation of his household: adults, children, and animals.

> And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day (Josh. 7:24–26).[2]

So total was this destruction that the pile of stones became a memorial. The very name of the region testified to a time when God spared none of His enemies. The mandate was clear: total destruction.

This is not normal, nor is it normative for peacetime. But there is no doubt that God is sometimes utterly ruthless. In fact, God is utterly ruthless for all eternity, which is the message of the existence of hell and the lake of fire. He is to be greatly feared by both friend and foe. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:10).

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2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Appendix A: "Sacrilege and Sanctions."

B. The Impotence of Gold

Gold will not protect you when the Medes invade Babylon, Isaiah warns those who would be alive two centuries later. Zephaniah warned the residents of Judah a century later: "Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land" (Zeph. 1:18). The Medes will be committed to destruction. Their commitment will be single-minded. The invaders will not be dissuaded from their errand of destruction by offers of silver or gold.

Under normal circumstances, the offer to exchange silver or gold is taken seriously by the recipient of the offer. He evaluates the benefits available to him by becoming the owner of this silver or gold. He compares these benefits with the costs of surrendering ownership of whatever the offerer seeks. Negotiation begins.

In the invasion, prophesied Isaiah, a Babylonian will ask for his life. His life will be of little value to an invader unless the invader is harvesting a crop of slaves. So, the problem facing the future Babylonian will be that the Medes will not be interested in personal economic gains. Their goal will be the destruction of their enemies. By sparing a person's life, the Mede would be compromising the military's commitment to destroy the enemy. So committed to destruction will the Medes be, Isaiah implied, that the offer of gold or silver will be rejected. The individual benefit of exterminating one more Babylonian will exceed the value of the silver or gold.

A warrior is not a businessman. He is not motivated by commercial goals.[3] A warrior has a different ethic. A businessman's ethic includes such standards as adherence to contracts, a commitment to cutting costs, the legitimacy of profit—"buy low, sell high"—the legitimacy of "high bid wins," a service mentality, a commitment to rationality, and self-interest. The warrior's ethic includes courage, honor, comradeship, group loyalty, obedience to orders, controlled destruction, and steadfastness under fire. Without these, an army cannot win. A warrior is not supposed to surrender to the temptation of personal gain at the expense of his military unit.

There are exceptions. Every army has its unofficial experts in commerce, who do possess the skills of the businessman. They are unlikely to possess the businessman's ethic, only his skills of negoti-

3. Booty is not commerce. He gets booty through victory, not as a bribe.

ation and entrepreneurship. These specialists operate for the benefit of senior officers in their own units. They benefit those close to them or those over them. An army would disintegrate immediately if all of its members were committed to these skills. But it would become very inefficient if none of them was. An inefficient army loses battles.

There is a common saying, "Every person has his price." This is universally true, as Jesus' parable of the pearl of great price indicates (Matt. 13:45–46).[4] But this universal principle is applied differently in different circumstances by different people. The asking price of the invading Medes is honor in battle. The offer of silver or gold is the offer of a lower-value good to the warrior seeking honor in battle. He has a price, but the price must be paid by the victim's death. The more committed the warrior is to the warrior ethic, the less likely he will be tempted by an offer of gold or silver. In the view of the warrior, the victim has nothing of value to offer other than his own death. This does the victim no good.

In times of crisis, gold and silver may not help their owners: a terminal disease, a terminal military invasion, a terminal revolution. In normal times, precious metals have granted their owners opportunities to evade the effects of threats.

Conclusion

Isaiah told his listeners that Babylonians will someday face a crisis so intense that its silver and gold will not buy them out of danger. The Medes will be in no mood to truck and barter. Future Babylonians will find that they have put their trust in false deliverers: gold and silver.

This message reminds the listeners that God is sovereign. He is men's only reliable hope. Isaiah identifies God as being against Babylon. Its gold will not save it.

4. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. 13:45–46).

10

DELAYED NEGATIVE SANCTIONS

Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee.

ISAIAH 33:1

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] Isaiah here affirms the existence of a system of moral cause and effect in history. He brings a covenant lawsuit against the spoilers. They deal unjustly with people. They will not get away with it.

He speaks of the spoiler. The Hebrew word can be translated as "destroyer." It can also mean "robber." "The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly" (Job 12:6). It can mean "oppressor." The psalmist sought deliverance "from the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about" (Ps. 17:9). It is a negative term.

This person once defrauded victims. Nothing happened to him. He did it again. There were no negative consequences. There will be. At some point in the future, someone else will do to him as he did to others. The same thing is characteristic of the person who deals deceitfully. He is pictured as a transgressor. "The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor" (Prov. 22:12). Isaiah said, "When thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee."

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

There is a temporal delay, almost as an echo is delayed. This delay persuades the covenant-breaker that there are no negative consequences in history. He gets away with whatever he is doing. This serves as confirmation of his assumption that God does not see his evil. "He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it" (Ps. 10:11). Because he regards God as blind, he also regards Him as impotent. God is supposedly not in a position to impose negative sanctions on evil-doers.

The delay can serve either as a period for repentance or as a period of repeated corruption. Isaiah implies that this is a period of corruption. But, at some point, the sinner ceases to practice his evil. Those around him are no longer his victims. He lowers his guard. He deals honestly with others. Then, without warning, he finds that he has become the victim of someone just like he had been. The negative sanctions are imposed by someone as corrupt as he had been.

There is a saying, "what goes around, comes around." This is another way of saying evildoers reap what they sow. "Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" (Job 4:8). "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).[2] The delay confirms them in an error: "There is no predictable cause and effect system in history." They become forgetful. They are not alert to those as deceitful or as oppressive as themselves. When they cease from their evil deeds, though not out of a change of heart, they find that their environment is not neutral. It is vindictive.

Isaiah affirms a system of moral causation in history. Ours is not a world governed by cosmic impersonalism. It is governed by cosmic personalism.[3] The events of history may appear to be random, but they are not.

Covenant-keepers are therefore not to despair. They are to wait on God's judgments in history. "O Lord, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou [our][4] arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble" (Isa. 33:2).

This gives hope to the righteous person, Isaiah affirms. "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes,

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 13.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

4. American Standard Version, English Standard Version.

that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure" (Isa. 33:15–16). The person who shakes his hands so that no bribe money passes into them understands the moral necessity of honest judgment. Bribery indicates that the context is judicial. This person is a judge. He turns away from evil. He does not listen to evil schemes. He does not let his eyes look upon situations in which he would be tempted to issue a corrupt judgment.

Conclusion

The oppressor will be oppressed. The deceiver will be deceived. The world is covenantal. It is governed in terms of an ethical code, and this code has sanctions. If individuals are not self-governed, then they will be governed by civil governments that impose negative sanctions. If civil governments are corrupt, then other agents will impose negative sanctions: evil-doers who find people to exploit who were once just like them.

There is no escape from the ethical standards that undergirded the Mosaic law. There is no escape from negative sanctions that are imposed by God when covenant-breakers do not repent, change their ways, and make restitution.

11

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WILDERNESS

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

ISAIAH 41:17–18

A. Theonomy and Society

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] These promises appear in the context of a series of promises to Israel. "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (v. 14). The language indicates a complete transformation of the environment. "I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together" (v. 19). This transformation had as its goal the widespread acknowledgment of God as sovereign over history. "That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it" (v. 20).

Is this to be taken literally? No. Why should God plant trees when the people who own the land can plant them? Are there fir trees in the desert? Pine trees? No. But myrtle wood comes from Palestine. There are olive trees inside the modern nation of Israel. They were not planted by God. They were planted by men.

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1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

Then what was the meaning of the passage? It asserts that God is behind the flowering of a wilderness. How? By means of His law. When men make peace, when their civil courts enforce the Mosaic laws governing property, and when men fulfill their contractual promises, society will be blessed. Productivity will increase. Wealth will increase. Out of the desert will spring trees. This promise has been fulfilled in the modern State of Israel. Irrigation systems, modern agricultural technology, and capital have made it possible for those living inside the borders of the nation to export agricultural produce to Europe.

Then how does God get the credit? The same way that He did under the Mosaic law: through a widespread realization that God's Bible-revealed laws are the basis of the good society.

> Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8)[2]

But what happens when men's faith in God is replaced by faith in the autonomous free market order? Or when they see civil law as the product of men's minds? Or when civil law is seen either in terms of universal logical categories of autonomous man, or else in terms of the political compromises of voting blocs? At that point, men move from the worship of God to the worship of man. Men cease to give credit to God.

This is nothing new, as Isaiah said in the remainder of the chapter. Bring your case before me, God tells Israel (v. 21). Give us your historical background (v. 22). Then tell us what will come next. "Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come" (v. 23). Israel cannot safely do this. God then renders judgment. "Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought: an abomination is he that chooseth you" (v. 24). "Behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing: their molten images are wind and confusion" (v. 29).

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

B. Miracles Are Not Required

Isaiah spoke of God as the source of blessings. God will provide water to those who are thirsty. This is a messianic prophecy. It may not seem like it, but it is. It speaks of one who comes to judge kings in God's name. "I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon my name: and he shall come upon princes as upon morter, and as the potter treadeth clay" (v. 25). This person could be seen as Cyrus, but Cyrus did not come in God's name. The next chapter speaks of this person in detail. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles" (Isa. 42:1). "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house" (vv. 6–7). Jesus declared at the beginning of His ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18).[3] He also told the woman at the well, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13–14).

Isaiah paints a verbal picture of God watering the wilderness. The land will bloom. This is not a prophecy of God literally planting pine trees in the desert. It is a prophecy of the transformation of the earth through the work of the Messiah. The Messiah will deliver prisoners from bondage. He will bring sight to the blind. He will call men to a great harvest. "Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few" (Matt. 9:37).

The poor need deliverance. This is the deliverance from sin and bondage. When this is accomplished through God's grace, men can then begin the transformation of the wilderness. This will be seen in a literal blooming of deserts. This blooming is to serve as a visible verification of God's system of corporate covenantal sanctions. It is to reinforce the covenant. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:17–18).[4] This is why any assertion of man's autonomy threatens to restore the wilderness. Isaiah repeatedly offered images of the return of wilderness as an image of God's negative sanctions.

> Yet the defenced city shall be desolate, and the habitation forsaken, and left like a wilderness: there shall the calf feed, and there shall he lie down, and consume the branches thereof. When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off: the women come, and set them on fire: for it is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour (Isa. 27:10–11).

> Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation (Isa. 64:10).

Isaiah brings a message of *judgment unto desolation*, yet also *judgment unto restoration*. First will come the wilderness, then the restoration.

> Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city: Because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks; Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field (Isa. 32:13–16).

Conclusion

Isaiah presented his message of restoration in terms of the miraculous intervention of God. God will provide flowing water in the wilderness. He will plant trees in the wilderness. Isaiah was not prophesying the advent of God as a kind of Johnny Appleseed,[5] planting apple trees across the land. He is prophesying the coming of the Messiah, who will make men fruitful through God's grace and their own repentance. They will in turn go into the fields to reap a harvest. The imagery is that of miraculous intervention in a wilderness. The meaning is this: *the redemption of entire societies*. The fruitfulness of the gospel, when applied, will bring productivity to a thirsty world.

4. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 21, 22.

5. The model for the legendary character was John Chapman (1774–1845), who established orchards in the states of Ohio and Indiana.

Jesus promised this to the woman at the well. Then she recognized how to begin: by bringing the message of His presence to people in her community. She was the new fruit. She was evidence of the transformation of the wilderness.

> The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him (John 4:28–30).

> So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world (John 4:40–42).

12

INVOKING THE MOSAIC LAW

Who among you will give ear to this? who will hearken and hear for the time to come? Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the LORD, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart.

ISAIAH 42:23–25

A. Covenants Lawsuits

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] The prophets came before Israel and Judah to present a series of covenant lawsuits. God directed them to bring these lawsuits on His behalf. These lawsuits had a specific form: a list of national sins, a warning of coming negative corporate sanctions, a call to repentance, and a promise of restoration after a time of suffering, which would include national captivity.

These lawsuits warned of specific negative corporate sanctions. These sanctions were grounded judicially in the original covenant between God and national Israel. Every covenant has sanctions: positive and negative. The Mosaic Covenant's list of positive sanctions was much shorter than the list of negative corporate sanctions. The lists can be found in two places: Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Here, Isaiah speaks of negative sanctions as already operating in

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

the life of the nation. "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned?" The sins have been going on for some time. Preliminary negative sanctions had already been applied by God. The implication is that God had waited to send Isaiah to bring a covenant lawsuit until a preliminary manifestation of the negative sanctions was visible to all.

There could be no legitimate doubt regarding the source of these negative sanctions: God. These sanctions were not random. They were effects grounded judicially in God's covenantal law-order. They were also not the exclusive result of conventional military or economic causes. They had come because of the actions of the people. "They would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law."

To discuss the prophets apart from a detailed consideration of the Ten Commandments and their applications in the case laws of Exodus 21–23 is to avoid discussing the central issue of the ministry of all of the prophets: bringing a covenant lawsuit. Every covenant has stipulations. This means that it has laws that are based on an ethical system. *Without stipulations and sanctions, there is no covenant*.

God's covenant with Israel had stipulations. We call these laws the Mosaic law. They were the laws associated with national Israel from Moses to the captivity. There were changes in the law after the return of Israelites to the land. For one thing, the laws governing the inheritance of rural land changed. The gentiles who had been moved by Assyria and Babylon into the land were not to be dispossessed by the returning Israelites. Ezekiel announced this.

> And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord God (Ezek. 47:22–23).[2]

So, there were modifications. By the time of Jesus, Israelites lawfully celebrated the Passover apart from their families. Jesus' Upper Room discourse was delivered only to men (John 13–17).

The prophets brought their covenant lawsuits in the name of the Mosaic Covenant. "They would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law." This rebellion had already brought on

2. Chapter 22.

God's negative sanctions. "Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle." But Israel had not perceived the covenantal consistency of these sanctions with the Mosaic law itself. "It hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart." Israel was so far advanced in its covenant-breaking that the people had forgotten that the law itself had warned of negative sanctions. The Israelites were less covenantally self-conscious as the Philistines had been in the days of Samuel. The Philistines had experienced an outbreak of boils, city by city, as the captured Ark of the Covenant passed from city to city. Their priests said to send it back to Israel by a unique method.

> Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: And take the ark of the Lord, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Beth-shemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us (I Sam. 6:7–9).

When the cattle turned toward Israel, the Philistines knew that their afflictions had not been due to a random plague.[3] The people of Israel in Isaiah's day did not understand covenantal cause and effect equally well.

The prophets came before the people to remind them of the Mosaic law: its statutes and its sanctions. God is the source of Israel's afflictions, Isaiah warns them. This was not a new message. It was built into the original texts of the law. This law was supposed to be read to the assembled nation every seventh year, the sabbatical year.

> And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, When all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it (Deut. 31:10–13).[4]

3. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 13.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 75.

If this law was still being obeyed, which seems unlikely, the Israelites did not take seriously the sanctions promised by God for disobedience. The prophets came before the people to remind them that what they had heard was not mere theory. It was a standing threat to their very survival individually. When God brings negative sanctions against the nation, they warned, many would suffer terrible deaths.

The nation ignored them. They were not taken seriously. The counsellors of the kings prophesied good times. The people wanted it this way. God told Isaiah,

> Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever: That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits (Isa. 30:8–10).

Conclusion

Isaiah warned his listeners that God had placed the nation under visible judgment. He told them that they had not recognized the source of their troubles. But why not? Because they had violated God's law with impunity. This was not natural law or the supposed law of nations. This was the Mosaic code.

They should have known from the beginning that God's negative corporate sanctions were coming. The law had spelled them out in detail. But they had paid no more attention to the sanctions than they had to the stipulations. In this, they were like contemporary Christians, who also pay no attention to the law's stipulations. They also do not worry about the sanctions.

13

THE PROMISE OF ABUNDANCE

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

ISAIAH 55:1–2

A. Come and Buy

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] Isaiah tells the thirsty person to come and drink. He tells the person with no money to come and buy. Buy with what? With nothing. "Buy wine and milk without money and without price." This cannot be taken literally. If you buy something, you give up the use of something else. If you buy something, you pay a price. This is what it means to buy. So, the verse was not meant to be taken literally.

He then asks a pair of questions: "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" The implication here is that they were wasting their money. Bread sustains life. These people were spending their money on that which does not sustain life. They were not even getting satisfaction for their money. They were therefore wasting their lives.

He then calls them to change their ways. "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." He begins the passage with a call to buy milk and wine with-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

out money. He cannot have been talking about milk and wine. He is talking about things that are more valuable than milk and wine, yet free. Jesus told the same thing to the woman at the well. “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13–14). This was not a new message in Jesus’ day. It was the fulfillment of an old message.

B. A New Covenant

Isaiah then introduced the context of this offer of free food. “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (v. 3). This new covenant will be brought by a new leader. “Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people” (v. 4). The gentile nations will respond to this new covenant. “Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee” (v. 5). There should be no doubt: these are messianic promises.

The issue here is ethics. “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (v. 7). Here is true abundance: *the abundance of God’s mercy*.

Isaiah compares the transforming message of redemption with agricultural productivity.

> For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (vv. 10–11).

The fulfillment of all this began with the ministry of Jesus. He twice fed thousands of people with bread (Matt. 14; 15). This was free food for the asking. Yet the bread He offered them was the bread of life.

> Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give

> us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst (John 6:32–35).

Jesus fulfilled the promise of Isaiah regarding bread. He brought the same message: *redemption from sin*. The people did not grasp this, any more than their predecessors had grasped Isaiah's message. "Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled" (John 6:29) He warned them, as Isaiah had warned his listeners: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6:27). They responded appropriately: "Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:28–29).

Jesus later announced a new meal, which we call the Lord's Supper, in terms of bread and wine. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it" (Matt. 26:26–27).

C. Redemption

Isaiah again returns to the theme of thorns and briers. "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off" (v. 13). The curse which he prophesied in Isaiah 5:4–6[2] will be removed, just as he said in Isaiah 32:13.[3] Thorns and briers will no longer characterize the deserted land of Israel and Judah.

The language of agricultural productivity is used with respect to redemption. The hearts of the people will be changed by God through the message of His Messiah. *This message of redemption will produce agricultural transformation*. There is a relationship between covenant-keeping and outward prosperity (Deut. 28:1–14).[4] The prophets reaffirmed this system of covenantal confirmation.

2. Chapter 6.
3. Chapter 11.
4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

The modern world has rejected the relevance of this connection. Covenants are seen as primarily political. The covenants of church and family are relegated to the private sphere, as is the individual covenant with God. Moderns do not accept as operational the system of covenantal causation described in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. This includes most modern Christians. They assume that the laws of economics, if any, are separate from theological confession.

Conclusion

Isaiah here told people who lack money or assets that God had not abandoned them. God offered water for the thirsty and food for the hungry. But his language indicated that this offer related to spiritual matters. It relates to a messianic promise of covenantal restoration. "Let your soul delight itself in fatness."

Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. He gave water to the thirsty woman and food to hungry crowds. He did this as visible testimonies that confirmed His office as messiah. He did literally what Isaiah had declared figuratively. Then he moved His listeners back from literalism to ethics, which Isaiah had intended all along.

14

THE DECLARATION OF COVENANTAL LIBERTY

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.

ISAIAH 61:1–2

A. The Kinsman Redeemer

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] This passage is based on the jubilee laws of Leviticus 25. In the jubilee year, all leased rural land was to be returned to the heirs of the conquest generation (vv. 14–17,[2] 23–24[3]). The heirs of the conquest generation were also to be freed from debt bondservice (vv. 39–43).[4] If an heir had been sold into debt servitude to a stranger, he could be liberated at any time by his nearest of kin, the kinsman-redeemer, through the payment of a prorated redemption price (vv. 47–55).[5]

This is a messianic prophecy. We know this because Jesus cited it in the first public presentation of His ministry.

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1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 26.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 30.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 32.

> And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears (Luke 4:16–21).[6]

Jesus accomplished this by acting as the Kinsman-Redeemer. At the cross, He paid the price to redeem those in bondage. What was the task of a kinsman-redeemer? This:

> And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself. And he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of jubile: and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him. If there be yet many years behind, according unto them he shall give again the price of his redemption out of the money that he was bought for. And if there remain but few years unto the year of jubile, then he shall count with him, and according unto his years shall he give him again the price of his redemption (Lev. 25:47–52).[7]

This was the judicial basis of liberation under the Mosaic law. Someone had to pay the price if the bondsman could not afford to redeem himself. This is the case with all mankind. " For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).[8] Man has nothing of value to offer God. "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isa. 64:6).

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6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

7. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 32.

8. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

B. Comprehensive Restoration

Isaiah made it plain to his listeners that he was talking about restoration. He used the symbolism of desolate people. "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified" (v. 3). A tree of righteousness is an ethically restored tree. He then shifted the imagery of desolation to geography. "And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations" (v. 4).

The supreme threat offered by the prophets was captivity. But this will not be permanent captivity. There will be restoration of covenantal social hierarchy: *the righteous will be on top*. "And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers" (v. 5). *There will be a great reversal.* "But ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves" (v. 6).

Such a reversal was announced by Mary when she learned of the meaning of her pregnancy.

> And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever (Luke 1:50–55).[9]

These passages testify against the ideal of economic equality. *The ideal of economic equality is the devil's own lie*. It rests on the lie of a world that is not governed by predictable covenantal sanctions. It assumes that corporate obedience to God's Bible-revealed laws does not bring economic benefits, a denial of Deuteronomy 28:1–14.[10] It denies that corporate disobedience to God's Bible revealed laws does not bring economic loss (Deut. 28:15–68). Every attempt to pursue the politics of economic equality is a defiant rejection of the Mosaic law, the prophets, and the New Testament doctrine of heaven and

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9. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 1.

10. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 69.

hell. Even in heaven, there will be inequality (I Cor. 3:10–15).[11] Even in hell there will be inequality (Luke 12:47–48).[12]

The crucial issue for Israel was righteousness. "For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations" (v. 11).

Conclusion

The jubilee year began on the day of atonement. "Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land" (Lev. 25:9). This was the announcement of God's covering of the sins of the nation. Only then could the year of deliverance begin.

Men's deliverance from sin is the essence of this release from bondage. When covenant-keepers grow like trees of righteousness, we can expect the great reversal of the social order. The foundations of this reversal were laid by Christ as the Kinsman-Redeemer.

11. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

12. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 28.

15

NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them.

ISAIAH 65:20–23

A. The Context Was Healing

The context of this prophecy was Isaiah's announcement of God's creation of the New Heavens and New Earth. "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (v. 17). The theocentric issue was inheritance in history: point five of the biblical covenant.[1]

Amillennialists argue that this is figurative language that refers to the post-resurrection world. The problem with such an interpretation is the fact that sinners will still be present. "The sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed." Saints and sinners will not intermingle in the world beyond death. Jesus, in His parable of the rich man and Lazarus, put these words in Abraham's mouth: "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence" (Luke 16:26). So, the amillennialist prefers to avoid mentioning this Isaiah passage. It is the number-one passage in the Bible that refutes amillennialism. In his book, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (1958), amillennialist Archibald Hughes took the novel approach of refusing to comment on this passage, despite the title of his book, and despite the fact that the phrase appears in the Bible only five times.[2] This was not an oversight. This was an admission of defeat. Other amillennial commentators spiritualize away the language. They deny what the text clearly says. They strip it of all reference to history.[3]

The passage refers to history. No covenant-keeping Hebrew would have argued otherwise in Isaiah's day. The prophets dealt with the present in terms of the *historical* future. They did not come before their listeners to warn them of judgment outside of history and beyond the grave. They warned them of historical consequences for covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking. Moses had done the same (Lev. 26; Deut. 28).

B. Long Life and Dominion

The standard greeting to a king in the ancient world was this: "O, king, live forever."[4] No one meant it literally, nor did kings assume that anyone did. History imposes boundaries on men, and the chief boundary is time. Time is not unlimited, either for individuals or nations.

Long life in good health is a universally recognized blessing. This is why health care expenditures are a large percentage of an economically wealthy nation's expenditures. People can afford to pay for better health, and they do. This prophecy says that at some point in the future, long life will be widespread. Dying at age one hundred will be considered abnormal. "The child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed." This means that *the years of productivity will be vastly extended*. People will be able to master their crafts, or have time to launch and perfect new careers. Knowledge will not suffer the discontinuity associated with old age

2. I commented on this fact in my book, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), p. 97.

3. An example of this is Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 202. I show the weakness of his argument in *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pp. 98–106.

4. Deut. 6:10; I Kings 1:31; Neh. 2:3; Dan. 2:4; 3:9.

and death. The skills achieved by someone over long years of work will accumulate.

The downside of this is that the skills of covenant-breakers will also accumulate. The shortening of life spans from Noah to Caleb placed covenant-breakers at a disadvantage. Their societies are cut short. Covenant-keeping societies are not. "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:5–6).[5] "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face" (Deut. 7:9–10). *Continuity is an advantage to a covenant-keeping society*. The church extends across generations and borders. Rival forms of religious organization do not. Where this is not the case, as with Islam, the conflict continues.

This prophecy refers to an era in which God restores long life spans because covenant-breakers are not dominant. Covenant-keepers are not threatened by this extension. This prophecy has to refer to an era in which saving faith has been extended to a broad majority of people.

C. The Fruits of One's Labor

There will be consistency between reaping and sowing. "And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands." This was seen in Isaiah's day as a great blessing. I can think of no society in which it would not be seen by laborers as a blessing.

The great motivation for labor the hope is that it will produce valuable results. The person who works wants to enjoy the benefits produced by the final products. It is a curse when he who plants does not reap. It was a curse on the Canaanites when the Israelites invaded. God delivered their handiwork into the hands of His people, "to give

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: A Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full" (Deut. 6:10b–11).

The fact that men will live in a world where the curse of Canaan no longer operates indicates the coming of an era of widespread covenant-keeping. Such a world is not an option for covenant-breakers, nor is it an option for covenant-keepers who are committing evil acts inconsistent with their profession of faith. Moses warned Israel,

> And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God (Deut. 8:19–20).[6]

In an era of widespread covenant-keeping, property rights will be secure. Men will be able to invest time and money in developing their farms and businesses because the civil courts will defend their rights—immunity from seizure—as owners of titles to property.

This development will increase everyone's sense of personal responsibility. The consequences of the actions of owners will be borne by the owners. This will make them more attentive to their actions than would be the case in a world in which others bear these consequences, whether positive or negative. The word "mine," when enforced by courts and custom, leads institutionally to the phrase, "my responsibility." This is consistent with the biblical concept of judgment. "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deut. 24:16).

D. Guaranteed Productivity

It will not only be that covenant-keepers in the coming era will retain the fruits of their labor. They will also avoid wasting time and money on fruitless labor. "They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble." There is a reason for this. "For they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them." This indicates that in a world marked by covenant-keeping, covenantal inheritance will reveal in history what it will reveal in eternity.

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6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

This prophecy also indicated that in the long era in which covenant-keeping is not widespread, there is less consistency between labor and emptiness, between labor and trouble. Isaiah lived in such an era. "Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God" (Isa. 49:4). He had already prophesied that covenant-breaking nations would eventually be characterized by emptiness. "It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion" (Isa. 29:8).

Conclusion

Isaiah testified throughout his ministry to the system of covenantal sanctions presented by God through Moses in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Covenant-keeping brings positive corporate sanctions in history, while covenant-breaking brings negative corporate sanctions. So, over time, covenant-keeping societies replace covenant-breaking societies. This is basic to the biblical concept of inheritance. The culmination of this historical process is presented in this passage.

Isaiah prophesied here regarding a better world to come in time and on earth. It will be characterized by long life in general, much longer life for covenant-keepers, private property, covenantal inheritance, and fruitful labor. This world is still in the future, but with respect to the increase of life expectancy, the extension of private property, and the increase in productivity, the West since about 1750 is far closer to literal fulfillment than anything that came before. The primary cause was the extension of the private property legal order, which was the result of centuries of Christian preaching against adultery, theft, envy, and covetousness. It is also the fulfillment of the fifth commandment: "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12).[7]

7. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 25.

JEREMIAH

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH

Jeremiah's ministry was aimed at Judah and the holy city, Jerusalem. He preached in the era immediately preceding the Babylonian captivity. His book of Lamentations was written after the captivity began in 586 B.C.

Jeremiah is identified as a major prophet. Among the prophets, his book is second in length only to Isaiah's. We might expect to find considerable material relating to economics, but there is almost nothing. In Chapter 22, he criticized those who do not pay wages. In Chapter 32, he recorded his purchase of a field from a relative. In Chapter 34, he commanded the people to release their Hebrew slaves. That is the extent of his concern with economics. There is nothing at all in Lamentations.

Economic sins did not loom large in his ministry. Neither did God's threat of negative corporate economic sanctions.

16

NON-PAYMENT OF WAGES

> *Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; That saith, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is cieled with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the* LORD. *But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it.*
>
> JEREMIAH 22:13–17

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] The economic crime mentioned here involved the non-payment of wages. "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work." This was a crime under the Mosaic law. "Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning" (Lev. 19:13).[2]

How could an individual avoid paying his neighbors for their labor services? It might be possible to do this a few times. But word would eventually get out: this person does not pay wages. This sort of information spreads rapidly. The would-be employer would soon

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 13.

find that there was no one willing to sell his labor services to him. There would be a shortage of supply at the price paid: zero. The non-payment of wages was therefore not a free market phenomenon. Voluntarism would have made this practice uneconomical. So, what we have here is a system of compulsory labor. The house builder was using violence or the threat of violence against workers. This would have been possible only through the corruption of the civil courts.

Jeremiah asked a rhetorical question: "Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him?" What was his point? Israel had become economically productive over time by means of justice. This meant civil justice. The forefathers had not been equally corrupt. They dispensed greater justice in the courts than this generation. "He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD." This reign of justice had led to God's blessing in the form of economic growth.

In contrast, Jeremiah warned, the present generation saw itself only in terms of economic blessing, not its cause. "Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar?" They had causation backwards. They regarded the stepping stone to rulership as paved with the trappings of wealth. This wealth was the product of oppression, Jeremiah says.

Conclusion

This is the first economic crime mentioned by Jeremiah in his covenant lawsuit against Judah. This comes over one-third of the way into the written record of his ministry. This should make it clear that economic issues were not front and center in his list of accusations against Judah.

This accusation was a crime: non-payment of wages. It is theft. If a delay of one night constituted a crime under the Mosaic law, then refusal to pay was a far greater crime. This crime was part of a mindset, he said. People believed that the accumulation of the trappings of wealth would bring them positions of leadership. He asked rhetorically, "Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar?" The answer was no, they would not reign. They would be carried into captivity.

His ministry was straightforward. He warned his listeners that God's negative corporate sanctions were about to be applied by God on the entire nation. Why? Because these people had rebelled against

God. They worshipped idols. They did not pursue justice in the courts. These were indicators of imminent punishment by God. "And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands" (Jer. 1:16).

This national evil had begun with the leaders. They had refused to enforce God's law. "The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit" (Jer. 2:8). This was comprehensive rebellion. Its cure would be comprehensive negative sanctions.

17

FAITH IN THE FUTURE

And Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it.

JEREMIAH 32:6–7

A. The Right of Redemption

This is a difficult text to interpret. What is the meaning of "the right of redemption"? It is central to the text, yet it is unclear.

The theocentric issue here was inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.[1] Under the law of the jubilee, an individual who was an heir of the conquest generation had the right of inheritance of rural land.

> In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession. And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbour, or buyest ought of thy neighbour's hand, ye shall not oppress one another: According to the number of years after the jubile thou shalt buy of thy neighbour, and according unto the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee: According to the multitude of years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years thou shalt diminish the price of it: for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell unto thee (Lev. 25:13–16).[2]

The general law of the jubilee was that it would occur in the year

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 26.

of the seventh sabbatical year. This was year 49, or the 50th year, in the same way that a person who just turned 49 is said to be in his 50th year.

> And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family (Lev. 25:8–10).

This law was clear. A piece of land could be leased out, but there was a time limit on the lease: 49 years. In the jubilee year, family members of the conquest generation inherited their share of the property. But there is no mention of the right of redemption in this passage. The reference comes later in the chapter. "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land" (Lev. 25:23–24).[3]

What was this right of redemption? It applied to the terms of the lease. The owner of the property or his relative had the right to buy back the land at any time. The price was fixed by statute: a pro-rated price based on the original lease price and the number of years until the jubilee year.

> If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold. And if the man have none to redeem it, and himself be able to redeem it; Then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it; that he may return unto his possession. But if he be not able to restore it to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the year of jubile: and in the jubile it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession (Lev. 25:25–28).

The right of redemption referred to the right of a close family member (the kinsman-redeemer) to redeem the property from the person who had paid the owner a flat price in order to take control of the land. With this in mind, we must now examine the nature of the offer made by Hanameel to his cousin Jeremiah.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 28.

B. The Offer

Hanameel came to Jeremiah and offered to sell him a piece of land. He said that Jeremiah possessed the right of redemption.

> So Hanameel mine uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver (Jer. 32:8–9).

This is inconsistent with the law of the jubilee year except on the following supposition: Jeremiah had leased the land to Hanameel. Hanameel had paid Jeremiah a flat price for the land. Now he wanted his money back. He would have been entitled to the pro-rated price based on the time remaining until the next jubilee year.

It is possible that this had been the arrangement, but it is not probable. The jubilee year occurred in the year of the seventh sabbatical year after the previous jubilee. Yet there is internal evidence in the book of Jeremiah that the sabbatical year had not been observed in Judah. The first piece of evidence is Jeremiah's condemnation of the owners of Hebrew debt servants that they had not released their servants, as required by Deuteronomy 15:1–6 (Jer. 34:8–9).[4] The second piece of evidence is Jeremiah's assertion that the captivity to come was God's punishment on both Israel and Judah for their having failed to rest the land, as required by the same Deuteronomic law. Their time in Babylon would therefore be limited. "To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years" (II Chr. 36:21). Jeremiah would subsequently tell his listeners: "Their Redeemer is strong; the LORD of hosts is his name: he shall throughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 50:34). The indication is that Judah had not honored the sabbatical year of rest for almost half a millennium. Seventy years of captivity were equal to 490 (70 × 7) years of land without rest. If Judah had not honored the laws of the sabbatical year, it is unlikely that the nation had honored the laws of the jubilee, which was the seventh sabbatical year. Ten jubilees had passed without observance.

4. Chapter 18.

If this was the case, then Hanameel must have assumed that the sale of his land would be permanent. There was a 490-year tradition to this effect in Judah. So, he spoke to Jeremiah of Jeremiah's right of redemption, as if this right was Jeremiah's right as his nearest of kin. Jeremiah did not contradict him. He arranged for the sale in full public view. Yet there was no such right under the Mosaic law.

C. The Motivation

To understand Hanameel's motivation, as well as Jeremiah's, we must understand the setting. Jeremiah was in prison. He had been thrown in prison by King Zedekiah in his tenth year of reigning over Judah. He reigned under the auspices of Nebuchadnezzar, who had put him on the throne. After 11 years, he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 24:17–20).

This was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. He had led his army to besiege Jerusalem. Jeremiah had prophesied publicly that the city would fall to the Chaldeans. The king would not escape, he had announced, but would be taken captive and placed before Nebuchadnezzar. Then Nebuchadnezzar would bring Zedekiah to Babylon (Jer. 32:1–5).

It was in prison that Jeremiah completed the transaction with his cousin. Hanameel must have believed Jeremiah's message. He came to his cousin in search of liquid capital: silver. What good was land to Hanameel if he was about to be taken captive? But silver might prove to be very useful. He might be able to buy his way out of bondage, or bribe a guard, or buy goods that would offer a better life to a slave.

In contrast, what good was land to Jeremiah? He would go into captivity with his people. He would not be able to collect rent from someone occupying the land, assuming anyone did. The land would be given its rest. He knew that their return would be decades in the future. He might not live that long. Yet Jeremiah agreed to the transaction. Why?

The details of the exchange are important for our correct understanding of the issues involved.

> And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open: And I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the

> book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison. And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days (Jer. 32:10–14).

"Many days," the text says. He fully understood just how long he would be outside the holy land. Here was visible testimony to those at the prison that he believed his own message.

This message was not just a message of captivity. It was also message of hope. "For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land" (Jer. 32:15). Then he recounted the history of God's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. He reviewed God's covenant lawsuit against the nation.

> And they came in, and possessed it; but they obeyed not thy voice, neither walked in thy law; they have done nothing of all that thou commandedst them to do: therefore thou hast caused all this evil to come upon them: Behold the mounts, they are come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence: and what thou hast spoken is come to pass; and, behold, thou seest it. And thou hast said unto me, O Lord GOD, Buy thee the field for money, and take witnesses; for the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans (Jer. 32:23–25).

God had told him to buy the field precisely because the city was about to fall to the Chaldeans. That which had led Hanameel to sell his birthright had led Jeremiah to purchase it. Here was God's promise of deliverance.

> Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul. For thus saith the LORD; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them. And fields shall be bought in this land, whereof ye say, It is desolate without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.

> Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith the Lord (Jer. 32:37–44).

Jeremiah bought a field with money. He did this in front of witnesses. This was his public affirmation of faith in God's promise: "I will cause their captivity to return." As we say in the United States, he put his money where his mouth was. As we also say, action speaks louder than words.

Conclusion

Jeremiah bought an illiquid asset in exchange for a liquid asset. He bought an asset that he could not personally put to productive use. He bought it in exchange for an asset that could be put to productive use. He did so for a reason: God had told him to. Why had God told him to do this? To affirm his confidence in God's promise to bring the remnant of Israel back into the land.

This was a visible display of Jeremiah's faith in the future. This was not necessarily faith in his future in the land. If anything, it was a testimony of his lack of faith in his future in the land. He would in all likelihood die outside the land. He had already announced God's time frame.

> And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations (Jer. 25:11–12).

18

THE RELEASE OF HEBREW BONDSERVANTS

> *This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the* Lord*, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them; That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother.*
>
> JEREMIAH 34:8–9

The theocentric issue here was inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.[1] This is evidence that the laws governing the sabbatical year were not being honored in Jeremiah's era. This was a violation of the laws governing the seventh or sabbatical year in Israel. It was part of a law governing morally compulsory zero-interest charity loans.

> At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the Lord's release (Deut. 15:1–2).[2]

This year of release from a zero-interest charitable loan also applied to everyone who had been placed in household captivity because he had defaulted on a charitable loan. Because the debt was annulled, the term of service was also annulled.

> And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 35.

> go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day (Deut. 15:12–15).[3]

When the people heard Jeremiah's warning, they released their Hebrew servants (Jer. 34:10). But they soon changed their minds. They subjected them again to servitude (v. 11). This indicates that they used violence. The civil government acquiesced to this re-subjugation. It may even have abetted it.

God's word then came to Jeremiah. God had established a covenant with Israel (v. 13). This covenant had a stipulation. "At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear" (Jer. 34:14).

There was a specific sanction associated with the sabbatical year of release: the threat of national defeat, which captivity surely was. In the midst of the law governing the sabbath year, God told them that if they obeyed, they would lend to foreign nations. This had to do with reigning.

> Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee (Deut. 15:5–6).[4]

In contrast, captivity would follow disobedience. Captivity is mentioned in the same passage as borrowing from foreigners—again, an issue of reigning.

> Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity. All thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume. The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail (Deut. 28:41–44).[5]

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 36:C:2.
4. *Ibid.*, ch. 37.
5. *Ibid.*, ch. 70.

Jeremiah came before the nation with a warning: national captivity is imminent. He got right to the point: release your Hebrew servants. They complied, then reneged. That sealed their doom. "Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth" (v. 17). The punishment would soon fit the crime. They had placed their previously released servants in bondage. God would therefore bring the Babylonians to place them in bondage. This was the *lex talionis* in action: eye for eye, tooth for tooth.

Conclusion

This is the second economic crime announced by Jeremiah. The first was their refusal to pay wages. Like the first crime, this was a specific violation of a Mosaic statute. They had kept poor brethren in bondage beyond the sabbatical year of release. They had made themselves doubly liable by re-subjecting them after they had released them. The punishment would be comparable: bondage abroad.

EZEKIEL

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL

The book of Ezekiel is the third longest of the prophetic books, behind Isaiah and Jeremiah. Ezekiel had no more to say about economics than Jeremiah did. There are only three themes, although one of them is repeated. The first relates to oppression. It appears three times.

> And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man, Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God (Ezek. 18:7–9; cf. vv. 16–17; 22:7, 12–13).

The second relates to the success of pagan kingdoms.

> The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord God; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God: Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee: With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; Behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness (Ezek. 28:1–7).

The third relates to the inheritance of rural land after the Israelites' return from captivity.

> So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel (Ezek. 47:21–22).

In short, there is not much on economics in Ezekiel. In this respect, he was typical of all the prophets except Isaiah.

19

AVOIDING OPPRESSION

And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man, Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God.

EZEKIEL 18:7–9

A. Oppression Is Judicial

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] A righteous person avoids oppression. As I have argued in this commentary and in my previous commentaries on the five books of Moses (Pentateuch), *the Old Testament's context of oppression was almost always judicial*. Oppression generally involved the misuse of the civil court system in order to gain some advantage over judicially innocent people. This judicial context is clear in Ezekiel's condemnation of the rulers: the princes of Israel.

> Behold, the princes of Israel, every one were in thee to their power to shed blood. In thee have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of thee have they dealt by oppression with the stranger: in thee have they vexed the fatherless and the widow (Ezek. 22:6–7).

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

> In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou hast taken usury and increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord God. Behold, therefore I have smitten mine hand at thy dishonest gain which thou hast made, and at thy blood which hath been in the midst of thee (Ezek. 22:12–13).

Ezekiel here presents characteristics of a righteous person by describing what a righteous person does and then contrasting his actions with what an unrighteous person does. The list relies heavily on the Mosaic law. He provided a shorter list in verses 16 and 17.

> Neither hath oppressed any, hath not withholden the pledge, neither hath spoiled by violence, but hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment, That hath taken off his hand from the poor, that hath not received usury nor increase, hath executed my judgments, hath walked in my statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live.

To understand what he was getting at, we need to compare his list with the Mosaic law's statutes governing economics.

B. Debt

The righteous person restores the pledge to the debtor. This refers to the law's requirement that a debtor pledges an asset as collateral. If he refuses to repay or is unable to, the lender gets ownership of the asset. But, until such time as the debtor defaults, he has access to the item if it is basic to his comfort or his work. One example is a garment for keeping warm.

> If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious (Ex. 22:26–27).

Of what use is such collateral? The lender cannot use it. The debtor gets to use it. Yet it still has an important function. It limits the borrower's debt. He cannot pledge the asset against multiple loans. Because he surrenders it to the lender every day, he cannot indebt himself any further.[2]

There was a related law of pledges. "No man shall take the nether or the upper millstone to pledge: for he taketh a man's life to pledge" (Deut. 24:6). This prohibited the removal of a debtor's tool of pro-

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2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49:J.

duction. This tool will enable him to pay off the debt.[3]

One goal of the Mosaic law was to keep covenant-keepers out of debt. Covenant-keepers are supposed to be lenders, not debtors. "The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow" (Deut. 28:12). It is a curse to be in debt to covenant-breakers. "He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail" (Deut. 28:44).

C. Peace

The righteous man "hath spoiled none by violence." He has not used the threat of violence to achieve his ends.

The Mosaic law placed restrictions on violence. When two men fought, and one of them was injured, the other one had to pay for the injured man's forfeited time in recovering (Ex. 21:18–19).[4] A master who injured his slave so severely that the slave lost a tooth or an eye had to set the slave free (Ex. 21:26–27).[5] All personal vengeance was prohibited. "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste" (Deut. 32:35). The nearest of kin, in his office as blood avenger, was authorized to pursue and execute someone suspected of manslaughter, but this right was limited (Deut. 19:4–6). Cities of refuge served as sanctuaries for suspected criminals (Num. 35:9–13). The goal of the laws of the blood avenger was to eliminate family blood feuds.[6] The blood-avenger was the kinsman-redeemer.

To use violence as a means of gaining one's goals was anathema under the Mosaic economy. This was the mark of the covenant-breaker. The author of Proverbs warned his son:

> My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: My

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 60.

4. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 35.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 39.

6. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 21.

> son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood (Prov. 1:10–16).[7]

The civil government was supposed to bring negative sanctions against convicted perpetrators of violence. When rulers refused to enforce the law by means of the mandated civil sanctions, God threatened to bring judgment. Again, "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste" (Deut. 32:35).

The question arises: What about civil governments that use the threat of violence to benefit one group of judicially innocent people at the expense of another group? This is the fundamental judicial issue of the welfare state. The welfare state rests on this judicial principle: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

Because the Mosaic law opposed the use of violence as a means of attaining individual gain, by extension the law also opposed the use of violence by the state to attain one's own gain. The familiar phrase, "robbing Peter to pay Paul," expresses the essence of wealth redistribution by violence.

D. Charity

A mark of the righteous person is that he "hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment." This is an almost universal view of righteousness in every religion and every society.

This has nothing to say about the righteousness of civil government. Civil government uses compulsion to extract wealth from those under its jurisdiction. Civil government does not govern by voluntarism.

Compulsion is a denial of charity. When voters A and B decide that voter C should turn over half of his income to the government, and voter A will administer the transfer of funds to voter B at a fee of 50% of the money extracted from voter C, there is no charity. "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote" is based on a specific definition of democracy. "Democracy is the system of civil government whereby two wolves and a sheep vote on what to have for dinner."

Liberation theology and its less revolutionary Protestant versions

7. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 3.

of the Social Gospel proclaim that civil government should be an agency of charity. They proclaim that modern civil government lacks righteousness because it does not extract a large enough percentage of income from the rich to distribute to the poor.

They also deny the principle that governs the tithe: a flat percentage of income. They call for "progressive" taxation, which is graduated taxation, which is a clear violation of Exodus 12:49: the rule of law. "One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you."[8] It also violates Leviticus 19:15. "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour."[9] They do not refer to these verses when presenting their plans for the state to redistribute income by force. They assume that their readers will not make the connection, which is generally an accurate assumption.

E. Usury

Another defining characteristic of a righteousness person is this: "He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase."

What is usury, as defined by the Mosaic law? It is (1) any interest payment (2) taken from a poor person who has asked for (3) a charitable loan, and (4) who has pledged himself as collateral, should he fail to repay the loan. All four elements must be present in order for an interest payment to be classified as usury.

I have gone over this material in several places for several decades. Because most readers are not familiar with this background material, I review it here.

1. Any Interest Payment

Usury does not mean a large interest payment. It means any interest payment at all, in money or goods. The texts in the Mosaic law are clear on this point. A search of the Hebrew word translated in this passage and in Ezekiel 22:12[10] as "usury" produces the following examples.

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8. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

9. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 14.

10. "In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou hast taken usury and increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord God" (Ezek. 22:12).

> If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury (Ex. 22:25).[11]

> Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase (Lev. 25:36–37).[12]

> Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it (Deut. 23:19–20).[13]

There is not a word about "excessive interest" or anything similar. The concept of usury as excessive interest was an interpretation of medieval theologians, a view which was taken up by Protestants.

2. Poor People

Again, the text in Exodus is clear. "If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury" (Ex. 22:25).

In Deuteronomy 15, the law of the year of debt release appears in the first six verses.

> At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD's release. Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; **Save when there shall be no poor among you**; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it: Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee.[14]

So, this law had to do with the poor. The law will remain in force until such time as "there shall be no poor among you."

The national blessing associated with this law is the transformation of covenant-keepers into lenders to covenant-breakers. "Thou

11. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

12. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 29.

13. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 56.

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 36.

shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee." So, usury is a good thing when extracted from covenant-breakers.[15]

Additional evidence that this law applied only to poor people appears in the next section of Deuteronomy 15.

> If there be among you **a poor man** of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against **thy poor brother**, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land (vv. 7–11).

This moral injunction to lend—it was not a civil law—applies only to "a poor man of one of thy brethren."

3. A Charitable Loan

The loan bore no interest. This constituted a gift to the recipient. A business loan could impose an interest payment. The mark of a business loan was the fact that it did impose interest. It also had a stiffer penalty for failure to repay: he could be sold into slavery until the next jubilee year, which could be almost half a century in the future. In the same chapter that prohibits usury to a poor brother in the covenant (Lev. 25:36–37), this appears.

> And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself. And he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of jubile: and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him. If there be yet many years behind, according unto them he

15. *Ibid.*, ch. 37.

> shall give again the price of his redemption out of the money that he was bought for. And if there remain but few years unto the year of jubile, then he shall count with him, and according unto his years shall he give him again the price of his redemption. And as a yearly hired servant shall he be with him: and the other shall not rule with rigour over him in thy sight. And if he be not redeemed in these years, then he shall go out in the year of jubile, both he, and his children with him (Lev. 25:47–54).[16]

We know this has to refer to a non-charitable debt because the Hebrew in bondage because of failure to repay a zero-interest charitable loan had to be released in the sabbatical year.

> And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him (Deut. 15:12–14).

4. A Pledge of Servitude

Deuteronomy 15:12–14 indicates that there was a temporal limit to debt servitude: the seventh year. When the debt was legally cancelled in the seventh year, so was the requirement to repay through servitude. The cancellation of the debt brought the term of servitude to a close.

Why was there a term of servitude? There can be only one logical answer: the debtor's failure to repay the debt. Which kind of debt? A charitable loan. What was its characteristic feature? No interest payment.

F. Iniquity

The next mark of a righteous person is this: he "hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man." The term "iniquity" is a wide-ranging classification. The Hebrew word is used in more than 50 passages in the Old Testament. It is used in the Pentateuch only in the context of court judgments. Ezekiel is bringing a covenant lawsuit against Judah. This means that he is referring back to the Mosaic law, which had established the terms of the national covenant. So, he narrows the application of "iniquity" to the judicial sphere: "executed true judgment between man

16. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 32.

and man." There are the references to iniquity in the Mosaic law—the only times the word is used in the Pentateuch.

> Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour (Lev. 19:15).[17]

> Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure (Lev. 19:35).[18]

> He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he (Deut. 32:4).

The seeming exception is not an exception: "For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God" (Deut. 25:16). Its context is just weights. "But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (v. 15). Honest weights and measures in the Mosaic law was a reference to honest judgment in a court.

The righteous person "hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly." This is self-government under God, which means self-government under God's Bible-revealed laws.

Conclusion

As with all of the prophets, Ezekiel is best understood as bringing a covenant lawsuit against the nation.

When he listed the economic sins of the people, he relied exclusively on the Mosaic law. The Mosaic law established the terms of the national covenant. The covenant has been broken by the people, including the rulers. So, he identified the economic sins of the people by showing how the people have broken certain Mosaic laws governing economics.

Ezekiel did not come before the nation to call them to establish a welfare state. He did not call them to establish by civil law some scheme for compulsory wealth redistribution through new forms of taxation. In the rare cases when he mentioned economics, he called them to obey the Mosaic laws governing economics. To imply otherwise is to mislead the public.

17. *Ibid.*, ch. 14.
18. *Ibid.*, ch. 19.

20

RICHES AS A SNARE

By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; Behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness.

EZEKIEL 28:5–7

A. A Warning to Tyre

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] Ezekiel addresses this to the pagan king of Tyre. Ezekiel first condemns Tyre for its arrogance against Jerusalem.

> Son of man, because that Tyrus hath said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken that was the gates of the people: she is turned unto me: I shall be replenished, now she is laid waste: Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock (Ezek. 26:2–4).

The island city is doomed. Babylon will capture it, just as it would soon capture Jerusalem.

> For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses,

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

> and with chariots, and with horsemen, and companies, and much people. He shall slay with the sword thy daughters in the field: and he shall make a fort against thee, and cast a mount against thee, and lift up the buckler against thee (Ezek. 26:7–8).

With this as background, God brings this warning against the king.

> Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord God; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God: Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee (Ezek. 28:2–3).

At this point, Ezekiel presents his warning in terms of Tyre's wealth. He affirms the wisdom of Tyre. This wisdom has created a maritime trade economy: traffic. This prosperity has led the king to regard himself as an autonomous sovereign. "Thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God." This is the ancient sin of man that leads to destruction: to seek to be as God (Gen. 3:5).

B. Autonomous Wealth

The sin of the Tyre's ruler was the sin of autonomy: the belief, as Moses put it, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).[2] This sin was also the sin of the king of Babylon. "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isa. 14:13–14). Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that he would succumb to this same temptation.

> It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth. And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him (Dan. 4:22–23).

> That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

> shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility (Dan. 4:25–27).

This was fulfilled, as Nebuchadnezzar admitted in his confession of faith. "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (Dan. 4:37).

Through the common grace of cultural wisdom and geography, a nation can attain great wealth for a time. The system of economic cause and effect assures societies that if they abide by the principles governing biblical law, they can reap the economic blessings. The problem they face is the lure of autonomy. They will come to believe that they have prospered as a result of the might of their hands or a wisdom unique to them. Isaiah had prophesied over a century before Ezekiel's ministry regarding Tyre.

> Who hath taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth? The LORD of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth. Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: there is no more strength. He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms: the LORD hath given a commandment against the merchant city, to destroy the strong holds thereof (Isa. 23:8–11).

The Bible's system of economic causation leads from obedience to prosperity. Prosperity is supposed to reinforce men's confidence in the reliability of covenant law. It is supposed to confirm the covenant. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).[3] But prosperity can lead also to the sin of autonomy. This, Ezekiel announced to the king of Tyre, results in destruction. This, too, confirmed the covenant. It confirmed it by way of the negative corporate sanctions (Deut. 28:15–66).

3. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

Conclusion

Ezekiel told the king that he and his nation are under God's authority. Tyre has prospered, but this prosperity will end soon. Tyre will fall to Babylon as surely as Israel fell.

Ezekiel's message to covenant-breaking societies was simple: all are under God's law. The general principles of economics within the borders of Israel apply outside. Other nations can achieve prosperity, but they cannot retain it when the attribute their success to their wisdom, their power, or their local gods. They cannot retain it if they attribute their wealth to their autonomous wisdom.

21

FREE FOOD IN RIVAL KINGDOMS

> *Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad; Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it.*
>
> EZEKIEL 34:21–24

A. A Message of Hope

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] Ezekiel was a prophet of the exile era. Judah was in captivity when his ministry began (Ezek. 1:1–2). So, he was not warning the nation of negative sanctions to come. They had already come. Instead, he was warning them that their deliverance was assured. They should accept God's punishment gracefully, for they would not be captives forever. Here is God's promise, he announces.

> As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country (Ezek. 34:12–13).

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

This was a message of hope. Ezekiel reminds God's people of His power: the power to deliver out of captivity. "And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats" (v. 17). Therefore, his message was also a warning to the Babylonians. God's promise to deliver His people from captivity is a promise of negative sanctions against anyone who would oppress His people in the interim. "Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet?" (v. 18).

This is the background for the passage under consideration here. Someone had been acting as an oppressor. There was a victim. Ezekiel speaks of both groups. "Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad; Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle" (v. 21). So, God's message of deliverance is also a threat of negative sanctions against oppressors.

This threat was fulfilled in 539 B.C., when the Medo-Persians conquered Babylon in one night. The immediate cause was Belshazzar's feast, in which the guests ate off of the golden plates that had been taken from the temple. Daniel told the king in front of his nobles: "And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Dan. 5:25–28).

Having directed a warning to the Babylonians, Ezekiel proclaims the restoration of David's kingship. "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it" (vv. 23–24).

B. A Future David

Obviously, this did not refer to a resurrected David. It referred to a future son of David, who would serve as a shepherd. From this time on, however, Israel never again had a king from the ranks of the nation. Always, Israel would be under the rule of an empire: Medo-Persian,

Alexandrian, and Roman. So, who was this prophesied king? Jesus. He was a son of David in both genealogies (Matt. 1:6, Luke 3:31). He was King of kings, and Lord of lords (I Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16). Would He sit on a throne in Roman Israel? No. So, the prophecy never came true in a literal sense. It was not a literal prophecy. Yet the text says that this future king will feed the nation. This, He did, literally, on two occasions: the feeding of the crowds.

> And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children (Matt. 14:20–21).

> And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children (Matt. 15:34–38).

This feeding of the masses was evidence of His status as Messiah. But He immediately departed from the crowds both times.

> Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone (John 6:14–15).

Still, the crowds sought Him out. He warned them against their misinterpretation of His miracles: belief in deliverance through a political kingdom.

> Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent (John 6:26–29).

Jesus understood the lure of free bread. Rome was a society built on free bread and circuses. Any political order that promises to deliver free bread to the masses will find followers. Jesus warned His listeners against any such faith in any such promise. Such a promise

has nothing to do with the kingdom of God. On the contrary, it is an extension of Satan's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. "And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:3–4).[2]

Then what was Ezekiel's promise of a king all about? This king would be a shepherd and feed his sheep (v. 23). Previously, Ezekiel had prophesied this. "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day" (v. 12). Jesus was clearly referring to this passage when He announced:

> Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep (John 10:7–11).

The Shepherd had sheep. This was the background of Jesus' assignment to Peter.

> So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep (John 21:15–17).

So far, we know the following. First, Jesus was the son of David, the lawful king of Israel. Second, He rejected the idea that He should be a king over Israel based on His ability to distribute free bread. Third, He was the Good Shepherd. Fourth, He fed His sheep. Fifth, He delegated this responsibility to Peter as a representative figure of all pastors.

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2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

This had to do with spiritual feeding.[3] The frame of reference was not literal food provided by a king to the poor, meaning the civil government.

C. Misreading the Text

It should be obvious that Ezekiel's prophecy had nothing to do with a civil government's program of providing food stamps or other forms of taxpayer-subsidized food to poor people. But this was not obvious to Stephen Mott and Ronald J. Sider. Citing this passage in Ezekiel, they wrote:

> This ideal ruler will take responsibility for the needs of the people as a shepherd: "He will feed them and be their shepherd" (Ezek. 34:23). Ezekiel 34:4 denounces the failure of the shepherds (i.e., the rulers) of Israel to "feed" the people. . . . This teaching on the role of government applies not just to Israel but to government everywhere.[4]

> Those who cannot care for themselves should receive from their community a liberal sufficiency of the necessities of life provided in ways that preserve dignity, encourage responsibility and strengthen the family.[5]

Notice the identification of two separate concepts: society (voluntarism) and civil government (coercion). "Governmental action to empower the poor is one way we implement the truth that economic justice is a family affair."[6] The state is like a family, they insisted. This mixing of covenantal categories is basic to the Social Gospel's call for a tax-funded welfare state in the name of social justice.

Mott and Sider fell into the same error as the people did who saw Jesus' feeding of the crowds. These people wanted more free food. They were willing to subordinate themselves to any king who would rule over them on this basis. Mott and Sider regarded political legitimacy in the same way. They called on Christians to set up a welfare state that will provide free food and much more to the masses.

Conclusion

Ezekiel in this passage warned the Babylonians not to become oppressors of the Israelites. He also promised the Israelites of deliv-

3. Chapter 13.

4. Stephen Mott and Ronald J. Sider, "Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm," in David P. Gushee (ed), *Toward a Just and Caring Society: Christian Responses to Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), p. 44.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

erance to come. They would be delivered out of the hands of their Babylonian oppressors.

They would also have a king in the line of David. But, as we know, this prophecy was never fulfilled by a literal heir of David seated on a literal throne in Israel. This was a prophecy of Christ's messianic rule in history. It was not a prophecy of the construction of an international welfare state in the name of Jesus.

22

A SHARED INHERITANCE

So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord God.

EZEKIEL 47:21–23

A. Altering the Jubilee Land Inheritance Law

The theocentric issue here was inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.[1] This prophecy announced a fundamental break in the Mosaic economy. The laws that had governed rural land ownership, announced in Leviticus 25, would be superseded when Israel returned to the land after the Babylonian captivity. Prior to the captivity, the jubilee was supposed to mark the origin of rural land ownership: Israel's conquest of Canaan. God had destroyed the Canaanites through the conquest. "I am the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God" (Lev. 25:38). This marked God as the owner of the land.

In Leviticus 26, God prophesied what would happen to Israel. The nation would rebel. The people would not honor the law of the sabbatical year, when the land was not to be planted. "Six years thou

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard" (Lev. 25:3–4). Because of the leaders' refusal to enforce this law, the nation would be carried into captivity in order that the land be given its rest.

> And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it. And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth. And they shall fall one upon another, as it were before a sword, when none pursueth: and ye shall have no power to stand before your enemies. And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them (Lev. 26:32–39).

Jeremiah had told the people of Judah that this prophecy was about to be fulfilled. Ezekiel was on the far side of its fulfillment. But Moses' prophecy had not ended with captivity. There would be restoration.

> Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes. And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the LORD (Lev. 26:42–45).

B. Strangers in the Land

During the time of the captivity, only a few very poor Israelites were allowed to remain in the land. "But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time" (Jer. 39:10). They became the stewards of land which they had not enjoyed, never having been owners. The land inheritance law of the jubilee had not been honored by the authorities. The land had not been returned to the heirs of the conquest generation in year 49. Now the poorest members of the old order were allowed to become administrators of rural land.

The Assyrians had brought in foreigners to live in the northern kingdom. The Babylonians did the same with land in the southern kingdom. Jeremiah lamented: "Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens" (Lam. 5:2). These strangers remained in the land after a remnant of Israel returned under the Persians' rule. They became the Samaritans, who adopted a form of religion similar to the Israelites' religion.

Ezekiel made it clear that these people were not to be evicted from the land at the return of the Israelites. The tribes would again divide the land, but resident aliens were not to be dispossessed. *This implied a new form of landed inheritance*. It would be by possession, not confession. The strangers had not been covenant-keepers when they were brought in. Still, they were able to occupy the land. They did not honor the jubilee law. There was no need. The land would receive its rest in this sense: not being worked by a nation covenanted to God, which then defied His law regarding the sabbatical year. Outsiders who were under the authority of a pagan nation were brought in to care for the land. Fewer people would occupy the land. The intensity of agriculture would diminish. There would still be no year of rest for the land. These strangers would establish their legal claim to the land by occupying it and caring for it. This would not be ownership by confession and circumcision.

A new order would arrive when Israel returned. Never again would the nation fall into the sin of animism or polytheism. The sins of Israel would be the rival systems of legalism and Hellenism. These were ethical and philosophical departures from the Mosaic Covenant, not sacramental departures. Israel's imported replacements in the land had not been associated with the sacramental practices of the Canaanites, which were tied to local gods. Baal worship would no longer be a problem for Israel.

Far fewer Israelites returned than were carried off. "The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore, Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women" (Ezra 2:64–65). These figures were closely corroborated in Nehemiah 7:66–67. By comparison, there were a little over 600,000 fighting men who conquered the land under Joshua (Num. 26:51). There was plenty of land per family for the returning Israelites. There was no need for the resident aliens to be dispossessed.

Conclusion

The new system of rural land ownership was still tied to the tribal system of the Mosaic Covenant. The separation of the tribes was still to be maintained until the fulfillment of Jacob's messianic prophecy: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). But the Samaritans would be land-owning resident aliens from that time forth. They were not to be adopted into the tribes apart from confession and ritual practice, but they were not to be treated as non-heirs in the jubilee year. The basis of rural land ownership went from heirship of the conquest (genocide) to residency while Israel was in captivity. The older judicial foundation of rural land ownership—genocide—changed forever.

There is no biblical evidence or known extra-biblical evidence that the empires that ruled Israel after the exile honored the pre-exilic distribution of family-owned plots of land. There is also no evidence that the jubilee land laws were ever enforced.

HOSEA

INTRODUCTION TO HOSEA

Hosea's ministry was contemporary with Isaiah's. He served from Uzziah to Hezekiah (1:1). These were the same kings listed in Isaiah 1:1.

The book begins with an economic issue: prostitution. The Mosaic law said of prostitution, "Do not prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to be a whore; lest the land fall to whoredom, and the land become full of wickedness" (Lev. 19:29). Yet God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute (Hosea 1:2). This was an act of grace on God's part. Normally, such a woman would not be eligible for marriage.

God told him to name their children with names that indicated God's covenant lawsuit against Israel (vv. 5, 6, 9). Yet the negative sanctions will not be permanent, God said.

> Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel" (vv. 10–11).

Hosea contains only two sections dealing with economics. Hosea 2:8–9 presents a prophecy of God's removal of the covenantal blessings. "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness." Hosea 12:7–8 describes a corrupt merchant. "He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin." As with all of the prophets except for Isaiah,

Hosea did not have much to say about economics.

This should serve as an indicator: *economics was not a major concern of the prophets*. Compared to modern men, the prophets barely bothered about the issue. Economics was important only insofar as visible blessings and cursings are covenantal. Modern man denies that economics is covenantal, yet he is obsessed with economic growth. He believed that societies are judged, above all, in terms of their experience of economic growth.

23

THE DESTRUCTION OF WEALTH

For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness.

HOSEA 2:8–9

A. The Source of Blessings and Cursings

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] Job's response was correct: "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21b). This was not the response of Israel and Judah.

God is the source of all good things. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).[2] Israel and Judah had attributed to false gods the benefits they had received from the true God. This was a violation of the Mosaic law. This violation had specific negative consequences.

> But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and wor-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 34.

> ship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:18–20).

This negative corporate sanction was a form of disinheritance.[3] God told Hosea to speak to Israel and Judah as if they were not children of the covenant. God referred to both nations by the opposite names that He had given to the children of Hosea, Lo-ammi and Lo-ruhamah. The Hebrew "lo" is a negative. "Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ru-hamah. Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts" (Hosea 2:1–2). The two nations thought of themselves as being God's people (ammi) and pitied (ruhamah). Covenantally, they had rebelled. They had become negatives: not God's people and not pitied. They were children of harlotry. They were not heirs of the promise.

Of course, they were still heirs of the promise. That was because they were still under the covenant's sanctions. But they would be treated for a time by God as if they had been disinherited. Then, He would restore them.

> Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel" (Hosea 1:10–11).

B. Comprehensive Losses

The visible blessings of God involved economic prosperity. This was part of the Mosaic law (Deut 28:1–14).[4]

> Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store (Deut. 28:5).

> The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee (Deut. 28:8).

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3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 69.

> And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow (Deut. 28:11–12).

Israel and Judah had prospered. This could have been interpreted as the covenantal blessing of God. But it was not. They imitated the Israelites in the wilderness, who built a golden calf. "And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 32:3–4). Israel had literally done this.

> Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off; mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be ere they attain to innocency? For from Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces. For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up. Israel is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure. For they are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim hath hired lovers (Hosea 8:5–9).

They attributed to the calf the blessings they had received from God. So did their descendants. "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal" (2:8).

Hosea brought a covenant lawsuit against them for this act of idolatry. The promised punishment will be what the Mosaic law had promised the negative sanction would be. "Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness" (v. 9). Moses had warned their forefathers: "Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store" (Deut. 28:17). The form of the judgment would be exile, Moses had warned.

> Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof. Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof: thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee: thy

> sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them. Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long: and there shall be no might in thine hand. The fruit of thy land, and all thy labours, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed alway (Deut. 28:30–33).

> Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them. Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil; for thine olive shall cast his fruit (Deut. 28:39–40).

The prophets came with a covenant lawsuit. They told their listeners that the promised sanctions would come. There would be captivity. Others would inherit their land. Their punishment was consistent with their crime. They deserved captivity. They had worshipped false gods inside the land. The punishment was to serve men who served false gods outside the land. This was the specified Mosaic sanction.

> I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell (Deut. 4:26–28).

Conclusion

Hosea charged the people with having offered sacrifices to Baal. To do this, they used the fruits of their labors. These fruits had been given to them by God. So, God promised, He would remove these fruits. They would become poor.

This was a covenant lawsuit. It referred back to the Mosaic law and its sanctions. This was not a new message. It was a recapitulation of an old message. As was true of the other prophets, Hosea's message rested on specific judicial revelation.

24

CORRUPT RICHES

He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.

HOSEA 7:7–8

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] Ephraim was one of the tribes of Israel. Here, God singled out this tribe for condemnation. But Ephraim was not alone.

> Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt. The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him (Hosea 12:1–2).

Hosea was bringing a covenant lawsuit in the name of God. There had to be a specific infraction: a violation of some Mosaic statute. Ephraim's specific crime was oppression. "He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress." A false balance was a specific infraction of the Mosaic law that was representative of civil corruption. It was the essence of oppression, which was a judicial matter under the Mosaic law.

> Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

> Egypt. Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:35–37).[2]

Hosea accuses the tribe of judicial oppression. As a merchant tribe, it used false weights and measures. This was theft by fraud. The tribe had prospered as a result of this deception.

As a merchant tribe, Ephraim collectively prospered. "And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin." The usage of the Hebrew word for "found" was the same as it is in English. It meant "to discover." "If one be found slain in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who hath slain him" (Deut. 21:1). So, Ephraim corporately believed that the tribe had prospered as a result of its righteousness. This, at least, was its public self-testimony.

The text does not indicate whether the tribe actually believed this or not. The assertion may have been a matter of self-deception. Or it may have been a false front for public consumption. If it was self-deception, then the tribe's use of tools of deception had led to covenantal self-deception. This in turn was leading to God's comprehensive negative sanctions.

There was nothing suspect about its merchant status. There is no condemnation of this trade in the Mosaic law. It is rarely mentioned. But the word translated as "merchant" is the same as "Canaan." It almost always appears in that context. So, the implication is that the Canaanites were merchants. They had prospered for a time. Then God brought negative corporate sanctions. The same sanction threatened national Israel.

> And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:19–20).[3]

Hosea does not accuse Ephraim of worshipping false gods. He accuses the tribe of using deception to defraud the innocent.

The tribe had become rich. This was additional evidence that covenant-breaking can produce wealth for a season. Wealth can lead to greater covenant-breaking. This had disturbed the Psalmist.

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2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 19.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

> For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches (Ps. 73:3–12).[4]

Wealth can and does confirm covenant-breaking in the minds of covenant-breakers as surely it can and does confirm covenant-keeping in the minds of covenant-keepers. "But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).[5] The wealth of covenant-keepers compounds. The wealth of covenant-breakers is cut short. "For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee" (Ps. 73:27).

Conclusion

To interpret this covenant lawsuit as a comprehensive condemnation of trade as a career would be to mistake fraud for profit. Hosea was specific in his accusation. Ephraim had violated a specific Mosaic statute. This statute was representative of civil injustice as a whole. It necessarily involved the civil government, whose magistrates refused to enforce the law against false weights. This was government-sanctioned fraud. The practice was therefore biblical oppression.

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4. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

5. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

MICAH

INTRODUCTION TO MICAH

Micah is a short book. It is a good summary of God's covenant lawsuit against Judah and Samaria, i.e., Israel. It contains the themes of the so-called major prophets. It was written sometime in the eighth century, B.C.

Micah said almost nothing about economic sins. His lawsuit accused the leaders of condoning theft. What was being stolen? Rural land. How was this being stolen? By a refusal to enforce the jubilee law of rural land inheritance. By undercutting rural land inheritance, the rulers were undermining the political and economic decentralization that accompanies land ownership.

25

CAPTIVITY AS DISINHERITANCE

> *And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage. Therefore thus saith the* Lord*; Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks; neither shall ye go haughtily: for this time is evil.*
>
> MICAH 2:2–3

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] Micah presents a covenant lawsuit against Judah and Samaria, meaning Israel (1:1). He referred to the sin of covetousness, a reference to the tenth commandment: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Ex. 20:17). This law referred to specific pieces of property, not categories of property. This was not a prohibition against keeping up with the Joneses. It was a command against lusting after anything that Jones was unwilling to sell or which was illegal to sell, such as his wife. It had to do with an obsession to own another person's property.[2]

Micah says that this lust has resulted in specific illegal actions, namely, violence and oppression. The target of this lust is rural land and homes. Under the Mosaic law, rural land was under a specific lease arrangement with God. It could not be sold on a permanent

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 30.

basis. It could be leased for no more than 49 years. In the jubilee year, all rural land that was not in the possession of a priest (Lev. 27:19–20)[3] had to be returned to the heirs of the original conquest generation (Lev. 25:13).[4]

The thieves are oppressors: "They oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage." Oppression in the Mosaic law was a judicial category having to do with the misuse of civil law.[5] These thieves had gained the cooperation of the civil government, which had not brought negative sanctions against them for either their violence or their violation of the jubilee law regarding rural property.

The goal of these thieves was the transfer of another family's property to their family's inheritance. Land in Mosaic Israel was a uniquely inheritable form of capital due to the jubilee land law. Families could not legally transfer ownership of land to non-family members. The only exception was a transfer to a priest as the result of a broken vow. So, anyone who sought to obtain another family's property was accumulating land for his family. Micah warns that this theft will result in God's negative sanctions against the thief's family. "Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks; neither shall ye go haughtily: for this time is evil." A family-based sin produces a family-borne punishment.

This sin was the sin of Ahab, who had coveted Naboth's field. His wife Jezebel had false witnesses accuse Naboth of blasphemy, which was a capital crime (Lev. 24:10–13). After Naboth was executed, the king illegally confiscated his land. God sent Elijah to him while the king was in Naboth's vineyard. God told Elijah what to say. "And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine" (I Kings 21:19). He made the same prophecy against Jezebel. This was a covenant lawsuit. The prophesied sanction was applied to the king (I Kings 22:37–38) and his wife (II Kings 9:36–37).

Micah warns Israel that the sanction against theft will be applied by God: eye for eye, tooth for tooth. "In that day shall one take up a

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 37:C, E.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 25.

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.

parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, and say, We be utterly spoiled: he hath changed the portion of my people: how hath he removed it from me! turning away he hath divided our fields" (Micah 2:4). They had stolen others' fields; their fields will be stolen. They had sought to transfer others' inheritances to their families. God will transfer their inheritances to foreign families. This transfer will be permanent, Ezekiel announced after the captivity. "So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel" (Ezek. 47:21–22).[6]

Micah leaves no doubt as to the sin involved: it was Ahab's. "For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people" (Micah 6:16).

Conclusion

Micah offered a critique of an economic sin, covetousness, that had become an economic crime: land-grabbing. Covetousness is at root a sin of disinheritance: the desire to disinherit another's inheritance in order to increase one's own. God's threatened negative sanction was captivity. "And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver" (Micah 5:7–8). Those who had sought to appropriate their neighbors' fields were removed from their own fields. Others inherited these fields.

6. Chapter 22.

26

PRIVATE PROPERTY: A COVENANTAL BLESSING

But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord *of hosts hath spoken it.*

MICAH 4:4

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] The prophets brought a series of covenant lawsuits against Israel and Judah. These lawsuits predicted that negative corporate sanctions would be applied by God for covenant-breaking. But the covenant is also enforced by positive sanctions. The prophets did not prophesy judgment unto oblivion. They prophesied judgment unto restoration. There was always a positive sanction for Israel. This had been assured by Moses, the original prophet to Israel.

> And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

> possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers (Deut. 30:1–5).

A. Peace and Property

Micah tells his listeners that a day will come when the people of Israel will once again own property. This will not be collective ownership. The concept of collective ownership was foreign to the Mosaic law. Micah appeals to the desire of his listeners to own their own piece of ground. They wanted to call a place "home." God will bring this to pass, Micah told them.

They had lived in fear for a long time. This fear was well-founded. First, the rich and powerful coveted their land. The civil government was corrupt. The civil rulers were in league with the oppressors. They refused to enforce the jubilee land laws, which required that rural land be returned to the heirs of the conquest generation (Lev. 25:13).[2] Second, distrust was universal. "Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter in law against her mother in law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house" (Micah 7:5–6). In such an environment, voluntary cooperation was hopeless. Therefore, so was economic growth. Zechariah, a post-exilic prophet, described this environment retroactively.

> For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbour. But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the Lord of hosts. For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things (Zech. 8:10–12).[3]

Micah tells them that their heart's desire will come true. At some point, covenant-keepers will sit under their fig trees, enjoying the leisure that comes to those with sufficient capital to support them. "None shall make them afraid." This is the promise of peace. Peace is a requirement for productivity.[4] Productivity is a tool of dominion.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 25.
3. Chapter 32.
4. *Idem*.

B. No Social Gospel

Proponents of the Social Gospel and liberation theology have misrepresented the message of the prophets. The Mosaic law mandated the legal order in which capitalism flourishes: a legal order based on private property. The Social Gospel and the post-Marxist versions of liberation theology proclaim the civil government as an agent of wealth redistribution. The state is supposedly authorized to use the power of the gun to take property from the rich and transfer it to the poor. Liberation theologians invariably ignore the enormous costs of administration by the state. They also ignore or dismiss the cost to society of reduced production.

They refuse to discuss the fact that incumbent politicians have passed election campaign laws that protect incumbents. This has made it difficult for voters to remove them. The liberationists also ignore the effects of legislation passed in the late nineteenth century that have insulated government bureaucrats at the national level from interference by politicians. In the name of bureaucratic expertise and efficiency, American politicians in the late nineteenth century passed Civil Service laws that reduced the power of politicians to appoint government officials. Jobs are gained through competitive examination. Bureaucrats are rarely fired. This legislation has undermined local political machines, which had gained their power through the jobs that they could promise to constituents. This undermined the spoils system, i.e., operational democracy. This transferred political power to wealthy individuals and to large corporations, which have the money to fund specific politicians. It made the politicians dependent on the moneyed elite rather than on local political machines that mobilize local voters.

The prophets knew better than to trust the state to reform itself. They recognized that the state had become corrupt, that the rulers could not be trusted to uphold the Mosaic law. They recognized that the people lived in constant fear. They told the people what the source of this fear was: their own covetousness.

The Social Gospel and liberation theology both rest on a theology of the state which proclaims the civil government as morally reliable, in contrast to the private property order, which tends toward corruption. In the view of the liberationists, the restoration of institutional righteousness in society can come only when the voters entrust to the politicians and bureaucrats the authority to redistribute wealth by threat of violence. They do not acknowledge what should be obvious, namely, that this was precisely the judicial order of pre-exilic Israel and Judah.

Conclusion

Micah brought a message of long-run hope. There will come a day when God-fearing men will enjoy the fruits of their labor and their capital. They will sit in their vineyards in leisure, enjoying the blessings of prosperity. They will not live in fear. They will not live at the mercy of corrupt civil rulers.

27

THE TREASURES OF WICKEDNESS

Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable? Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.

MICAH 6:10–12

A. The Elite and the State

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] Micah reminds his listeners of what they already knew: the rich were rich because of their alliance with the civil rulers. The government did not prosecute the Mosaic laws against false weights and measures.

> Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt (Lev. 19:35–36).[2]

> Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 19.

> thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God (Deut. 25:13–16).[3]

The rich were corrupt. They were oppressors, meaning that they used the state to gain their wealth. They used the state's near-monopoly of violence to steal from the innocent.

Micah warns them of judgment to come. This judgment will be applied to the entire nation. "Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins" (v. 13). The corruption of the rich and the civil rulers was a reflection of the corruption of the people. *The people were responsible for the corruption of their rulers*. This was not a new message. It was the moral foundation of Leviticus 4, which specified that the sins of the rulers had to be atoned for by sacrifices offered by the people.[4]

B. Productivity Without Consumption

Micah describes what was about to come.

> Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied; and thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee; and thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver; and that which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword. Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine (vv. 14–15).

This was not a new message. It was basic to the story of Israel's conquest of Canaan. Moses had told them prior to the conquest:

> And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full (Deut. 6:10–11).

Immediately after these words, Moses warned them of what they would be tempted to think and do. "Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you" (Deut. 6:12–14). If they did this, they would suffer the consequences. What God had

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3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

4. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 4.

done on their behalf to the Canaanites, He would do on His behalf to them.

> And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:17–20).[5]

Micah came before the people to remind them that they were still under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. They had done exactly what Moses had warned against. They had forgotten God. They had worshipped idols.

C. Success for a Season

There were rich people in Israel and Judah. They had gained their wealth through corruption. They had used fraudulent weights. They had used violence. They had relied on corrupt civil rulers to advance their economic agenda at the expense of their victims. Micah says all this in full public view.

His covenant lawsuit acknowledges that corruption, fraud, violence, and oppression can prosper for long periods of time. The prophets did not come to the nation with a message of recent corruption. They came with a message of long-term moral corruption, from bottom to top. This corruption had made evil men wealthy. Nothing seemed to stand in their way.

The prophets told the nation that God stood in their way. He was about to close the pathway to moral destruction. He would bring invaders who would carry the people into a foreign land.

This was a message of hope. First, oppression by fellow Israelites would cease. Foreigners would become their oppressors. This was preferable to having brothers oppress brothers. Second, they would be carried into captivity. This had not been the fate of most of the Canaanites. They had been eradicated, though not completely. God had not told the Israelites to make them slaves. That was the Israelites' error, in the case of the Gibeonites (Josh. 9), and Israel's com-

5. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 21–23.

promise, in the case of other Canaanites. "And they drave not out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer: but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites unto this day, and serve under tribute" (Josh. 16:10). "Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out" (Josh. 17:13). There would be a remnant of Israel that would return to the land. The Hebrew oppressors in the meantime would lose their ability to oppress.

Conclusion

Micah did not doubt that corruption can prosper for a season. For this to happen, corrupt people must gain control over the rulers. The Mosaic law would then not be enforced. Micah and the other prophets always invoked the Mosaic statutes when bringing their covenant lawsuits against the nation. They called the people to repent. This meant a widespread return to the Mosaic law.

Corruption can prosper, but not indefinitely. If the people will not call it to a halt then God will. God intervenes in history to uphold his overall covenant: the dominion covenant.[6] He also intervenes to uphold His covenants with His people: individual, ecclesiastical, familial, and civil. He does this by imposing His covenantal sanctions, both negative and positive, both individual and corporate.

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

AMOS

INTRODUCTION TO AMOS

Amos was a former shepherd (Amos 7:14). He was a contemporary of Isaiah. King Uzziah reigned (Amos 1:1). This was in the mid-eighth century, B.C.

His primary economic concern was slavery. He was critical of slave buyers who paid little for their slaves. His concern was not slavery as such. The Mosaic law authorized slavery of foreigners (Lev. 25:44–46).[1] Amos was narrowly focused: the purchase and re-sale of Hebrew servants by Hebrew masters for very little money. It was illegal to resell Hebrew slaves (Lev. 25:42).[2] The mark of oppression was the fact that such sales went on at all. The mark of wanton oppression was the fact that this was being done at bargain basement prices.

He also brought a lawsuit against businessmen who used false weights and measures to defraud the public. This practice was a violation of a specific Mosaic law, which appears in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Apart from these two practices, Amos had nothing to say about economic oppression. As was true of the prophets, economics was not at the forefront of his covenant lawsuit.

The promoters of the evangelical version of the Social Gospel cite Amos repeatedly. There is a reason for this. Amos had so little to say about economic sins that it is difficult to draw any economic conclusions based on the texts. So, it is easy to read into the texts the collectivist welfare state program of the Social Gospel. They seek to harness Amos' rhetoric to their own political agenda.

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1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 31.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 30.

28

FORCED ENSLAVEMENT

> *Thus saith the* Lord*; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes.*
>
> AMOS 2:6

A. Re-Selling Hebrew Slaves

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] What was the nature of this transgression? This was not the sale of a criminal in order to raise money to make restitution to his victims. Such a forced sale was legal under the Mosaic law.

> If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double (Ex. 22:2–4).[2]

Because Amos identifies those who had been sold as victims, not thieves, this passage cannot be the legal context.

It was legal to sell a man into servitude if he had defaulted on a commercial debt. The creditor was entitled to be repaid. There was a law governing such a sale.

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1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 43.

> And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: But as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile: And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return (Lev. 25:39–41).[3]

So, a man sold under the terms of this law was not a victim of oppression.

Then was this kidnapping? The penalty for kidnapping was execution. "And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 21:16).[4] Amos does not mention the kidnapping of those sold into slavery.

So, the nature of the infraction is not straightforward.

There is a passage relating to female Hebrew slaves that might apply.

> And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, she shall not go out as the menservants do. If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her (Ex. 21:7–8).

A woman sold on this basis—the promise of marriage—was legally adopted into the bridegroom's family. He could not decide later to sell her.[5]

There was a similar passage, already cited, applying to those sold to raise money to pay off a debt (Lev. 25:39–41). To this law was appended this restriction: "For they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen" (Lev. 25:42).

By the process of elimination, we come to this conclusion: it is likely that the infraction identified by Amos had to do with the resale of temporary Hebrew bondservants. A Hebrew lawfully had become a servant in a household, but was then sold by that household to someone in a foreign nation or to a resident alien. Additionally, the jubilee law of release that governed Hebrew servants was not enforced; so, the victims were permanently enslaved. They could not buy their way out, nor could a close family member purchase their freedom prior to the jubilee year.

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3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 30.

4. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 34.

5. *Ibid*., ch. 31:B.

B. Pricing the Slaves

Amos said that "they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes." The Hebrew word indicates that the shoes in this case were sandals. Silver was worth having, but a pair of sandals were surely not worth what a human being was worth. Why would anyone who owned a Hebrew servant sell him for a pair of sandals? This makes no sense economically.

The next verse throws additional light on the practice. "That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek" (Amos 2:7a). The Hebrew word translated here as "pant" is elsewhere translated as "swallow." "Whose harvest the hungry eateth up, and taketh it even out of the thorns, and the robber swalloweth up their substance" (Job 5:5). It is also translated as "devour." "I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once" (Isa. 42:14). The sellers were driven by perversity: the enjoyment of destruction. They wanted to destroy poor people, heaping dust on their heads of the poor. So, they sold them cheap, out of spite. Later in the book, Amos announces:

> Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat? (Amos 8:4–6)

In Amos 2:7, he criticizes the sellers of the poor. In the later passage, he criticized the buyers. This is economically consistent. For every sale, there must be a purchase. The question is: Why sell a poor man for a pair of sandals when someone else will pay silver? Why sell low when you can sell high? The rule of the free market is "high bid wins." The motivation of the sandal-sellers is clear: a low price for a slave. What about the motivation of the slave-sellers?

Economists do not believe that an "unexploited opportunity" can last for long. If an entrepreneur learns that he can buy someone for a pair of sandals in one market and then re-sell him for silver in another market, soon the price of cheap slaves will rise, and the price of expensive slaves will fall. This process is called *arbitrage* [AWR-bi-trawzh]. There will not be multiple prices for essentially the same item. Except for transaction costs and transportation costs, the prices

in two markets will be the same in a free market society.

So, if this two-price condemnation was literal, why wasn't there an active market for Hebrew slaves: buying low and selling high? In a free market society, the economic situation of slaves-for-shoes and slaves-for-silver would not have lasted long. Yet Amos implied that this practice had been a common condition for a considerable time—long enough to infuriate God. "The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks" (Amos 4:2). Again, this assumes that we take his condemnation literally rather than poetically, i.e., a widespread disregard for human freedom and the Mosaic law.

This much is true: Israelites were selling other Israelites into slavery. The sellers were oppressors. They were violating the Mosaic law. The civil magistrates were allowing this. Amos referres to injustice in the gates. The term "gates" was used in the Old Testament to identify the place of civil judgment in a community. "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land" (Prov. 31:23). Amos says: "For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right" (Amos 5:12). *This was oppression by the civil government*: the quest for bribes. So widespread was the corruption of the courts that prudent men said nothing. "Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time" (Amos 5:13).

So corrupt had men become that they did not care what price they received. They sold their victims because they enjoyed demonstrating their ability to oppress others visibly. To oppress those who were poor and meek had become a source of social status for people with wealth and political influence. We say that "price is no consideration." We mean that a high price is not a major barrier to a purchase. Amos is saying that human freedom was held in such low esteem by the sellers that any price was acceptable. They were walking away from money. They could get silver, but some of them sold their brethren for sandals. This was what the leftist American economist Thorstein Veblen called conspicuous consumption.[6] As in imperial Rome, when rich men—and Cleopatra—would publicly drop a ground-up pearl into a cup of wine and then drink the wine, so were the Israelite oppressors.

6. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, [1899] 1902), ch. 4.

This must have been very profitable for those entrepreneurs who were engaged in the domestic slave trade: buying for sandals and selling for silver, rather like pearl sellers in Rome. But these sales could not have been easily predictable by slave traders. The sales must have been random. Two organized markets cannot have significant price differences for essentially the same product if free trade is allowed by the civil magistrates.

If we take Amos' words literally, the sale of Hebrew slaves in Israel and Judah was not a quest for financial profit, but a quest for status: conspicuous consumption. It was status through oppression. This indicated the extent of the moral decline and judicial corruption.

Conclusion

Amos brought a covenant lawsuit against Israel and Judah on the basis of widespread corruption. This included judicial oppression. The courts allowed rich Hebrews to sell their poor brethren into servitude, something prohibited by the Mosaic law.

By identifying multiple selling prices for these slaves—silver and sandals—Amos identified a moral teaching: *the low value placed on liberty in Israel and Judah*. They had both become slave societies. The quest for social status had overcome rational economic calculation. Men sold other men for sandals when they could have sold them for silver. These people were not in the slave trade for money but rather for status.

Note: In the United States today, some rich women pay a thousand dollars or more for a pair of high-fashion sandals.[7] This is conspicuous consumption to the point of absurdity, but it is not based on a self-conscious commitment to the destruction of the poor. Rather, it is a commitment to frivolous self-amusement by empty-headed women—a pastime mentioned by Isaiah (Isa. 3:16–24).

7. Hillary de Vries, "Those Aren't Just Sandals, Darling, They're Destiny," *New York Times* (Sept. 25, 2005). This meant a little lower than an ounce of gold.

29

UNJUST JUDGES

> *Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.*
>
> AMOS 6:3–6

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1]

Amos directs this criticism to a specific group: men of high position. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!" (v. 1). They possessed leisure, as befits rulers who are the chief men of the nation. They were the people to whom the masses of Israel came. There should be no confusion here: these were civil officers. They occupied the seat of violence (v. 3). The Hebrew word is sometimes translated as injustice. "Not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure" (Job 16:17). It can refer to something false, as in false witness. "False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not" (Ps. 35:11). But, usually, it is translated as violence. "For they know not to do right, saith the LORD, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces" (Amos 3:10). This is poetic language. No one actually stores up a basement full of violence and a pantry full of robbery.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

Their crime was injustice. It was violence. These were not businessmen who had become rich through economic oppression. These were corrupt civil rulers who had become rich through injustice.

They were indolent and rich. They lived sumptuously. They drank too much. They ate too much expensive food. They were not saddened by the debased spiritual condition of their brethren. So, Amos prophesies, they would maintain their positions of leadership in a unique way. "Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed" (v. 7). They would be at the head of the line when the Babylonians departed for home.

It would be a mistake to view their primary crime as economic. They had not grown rich through free market transactions. They had grown rich through judicial corruption. Isaiah had delivered the same message.

> Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them. Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin (Isa. 1:23–25).[2]

The leisure and wealth they enjoyed came from their misuse of their high offices. To see the prophet as singling them out because of their wealth is to fail to ask the question: How did they obtain their wealth? Wealth was not their problem. Judicial corruption was.

Conclusion

Amos brought his covenant lawsuit against corrupt judges who had misused their high offices to enrich themselves. They had sold justice to the highest bidders. They had engaged in oppression.

This is not a condemnation of riches as such. It is a condemnation of the source of riches. Interpreters who present this passage as proof of oppression as inequality have not understood Moses on the blessings of inequality.

> The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And

2. Chapter 3.

> the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them (Deut. 28:12–13).[3]

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3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 70.

30

OPPRESSION THROUGH FALSE BALANCES

Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?

AMOS 8:4–6

The theocentric issue here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] This indictment of the businessmen of the nation is simple to understand. They had two sets of balances, one for selling goods and the other for buying goods. The balances were used to deceive buyers. Buyers believed they were being sold one weight's worth of goods, but in fact they were being sold less. This was a form of theft. The Mosaic law specified this practice as a moral evil.

> Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt (Lev. 19:35–36).[2]

> Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 19.

> thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God (Deut. 25:13–16).[3]

Amos, as a prophet, brings a covenant lawsuit against the nation. He linked this practice with the oppression of buying and selling Hebrew slaves. The people had a dream: "that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes." He had already brought this charge against them (Amos 2:6).[4]

They were not sabbath-breakers, but they chafed under the restriction on selling which the law of the sabbath imposed. They grumbled, "When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?" They wanted no rest, nor did they intend to provide it. They wanted income, and they were willing to violate the statutes of the Mosaic law to achieve this goal.

These people were oppressors. The innocent were taken advantage of by the people who possess influence. To do this, the oppressors had gained the cooperation of the judges, both ecclesiastical and civil. This joint winking of the eye constituted the sin of Israel. Amos and the other prophets warned that God's corporation national judgment was coming if the rulers did not repent.

Conclusion

There was nothing new about this accusation. The business community had indulged in theft through deception. These people had ignored God's law by tampering with the scales. This crime was the representative crime of injustice in the Mosaic law. "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure" (Lev. 19:35).[5] Solomon reinforced this connection.

> A divine sentence is in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment. A just weight and balance are the LORD's: all the weights of the bag are his work. It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness (Prov. 16:10–12).[6]

Amos made no call for general wealth redistribution by the state. It was a call for restitution. The crime was specific: fraud.

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3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

4. Chapter 28.

5. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 19.

6. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 51.

HAGGAI

INTRODUCTION TO HAGGAI

In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.

HAGGAI 1:1–2

Haggai was a prophet in the immediate post-exilic era. His contemporary was Zechariah. "Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them" (Ezra 5:1). God raised up both of them to deal with the same issue: the refusal of the Israelites to complete the temple.

By the time Haggai's ministry began, the people had been in the land for 16 years. They had returned in 536 B.C. They began to build the temple in the second year after their return (Ezra 3:8). Immediately, the leaders of the Samaritan residents of the land protested in writing to the king, asking him to order work to cease (Ezra 4:1–23). "Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia" (Ezra 4:24).

Darius of Persia came to the throne in 521 B.C. Haggai's ministry began "in the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month" (Hag. 1:1a). He chided them about their failure to complete God's temple. His message persuaded them.

> And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king (Hag. 1:14–15).

> And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king (Ezra 6:14–15).

It took about four years for them to finish this work. They had waited for 14 years after they ceased working on the temple two years after their return. It is clear that, had they persisted, they could have completed the temple within a few years after their return.

As a post-exilic prophet, Haggai did not have to deal with widespread idolatry. That national temptation ended forever during the exile. The Israelites learned first-hand what it was like to live under the rule of false gods. This was a Mosaic negative sanction.

> And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind (Deut. 28:64–65).

The Israelites' leaders had taken a stand against all such worship. The people accepted this. They maintained their separate existence as strangers in a strange land by invoking the name of God and Him alone. Most of them remained behind when it came time to return to the land. Those who did return were not again tempted to worship idols.

So, the task of the three post-exilic prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—was not to call them to abandon idols. Rather, their task was to call the people to act positively in terms of the Mosaic Covenant. The primary sins of the nation were not sins of commission, but rather sins of omission. So, the covenant lawsuits of the post-exilic prophets did not include a warning of corporate negative sanctions to come. Rather, they pointed to the absence of positive sanctions as evidence that God was displeased with them. They did not warn of negative sanctions to come if the people failed to repent. They warned of positive sanctions to come if the people did repent.

31

A BAG WITH HOLES

Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled [paneled] houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

HAGGAI 1:4–6

A. Under a Curse

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] The Israelites were under a curse. The curse was specific: a low rate of return on all of their investments. No matter what project they tried, it failed to prosper.

In the United States, there is a saying: "Don't pour money down a rathole." A rathole absorbs whatever is of value that you pour into it. You will not make a profit. A project described as a rathole is perceived as a losing proposition. Haggai described a series of five ratholes. They were all losing propositions. He used five metaphors: planting, eating, drinking, dressing, and wage-earning. He described all as acts of futility. The results will disappoint the one who pursues any of them.

Haggai's phrase, "a bag with holes," has come down through the centuries as a description of expensive futility. Haggai tells them that as surely as it is useless to replenish lost coins in a bag with holes, so is it useless to continue to follow the same old routine.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

What is the routine? Individuals who were suffering these losses continued to put themselves and their desires at the top of their individual lists of priorities. The construction of the temple was not on the list.

He begins with an introduction: a rhetorical question. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways" (Hag. 1:3b–5). Haggai used this introduction to prepare them for his explanation of the negative sanction of a consistent failure: their lack of success in all of their various projects, symbolized by their failures in five areas of planning.

B. Covenantal Causality

The pre-exilic prophets came before Israel and Judah and warned of terrible negative sanctions to come if they refused to repent. They said: "Do not look at your prosperity and conclude that God is favorable to you and your works. He hates your works. He will prove this by removing your wealth." Their covenant lawsuits identified specific economic practices that were violations of specific Mosaic statutes. They invoked the Mosaic law. They warned of negative corporate sanctions that were found in the Mosaic law. There were no exceptions to the structure of their lawsuits. *The Israelites' economic transgressions were found in the Mosaic law, and so were the negative sanctions*. A prophet merely recapitulated what the Mosaic law said: stipulations and negative sanctions. His message was clear: the prophesied negative sanctions would be imposed by God through foreign invaders. What God had told Moses repeatedly that He would do, He would surely do. Then He did.

The post-exilic prophets preached in the era following the comprehensive manifestation of the predictability of the Mosaic law's corporate negative sanctions. These sanctions were such that Israel never again turned to idols. God had finally gotten their attention. But they were still slow learners. They did not yet trust what the Mosaic law said regarding the positive sanctions.

Haggai brings a message. He tells them that they lacked visible success because they had placed their personal and family priorities above God's. They had built houses for themselves but no house for God.

He does not invoke a Mosaic statute, because there was no Mosaic statute regarding the construction of a temple. There were detailed

requirements regarding the Ark of the Covenant and its immediate environment: a series of concentric areas of holiness. But there is no evidence that the Ark was still in existence after the captivity. There were rules for the tabernacle, but not for the temple. There were individual negative sanctions associated with violating the tabernacle's zones of holiness, but there were no corporate negative sanctions associated with not building the temple.

Haggai does not invoke a Mosaic statute. He does invoke the optimism of Deuteronomy 28:1–14. This was the section devoted to positive sanctions for obedience to the Mosaic law. He tells his listeners that they did not prosper because they had not built the temple. The system of covenantal sanctions still operated.

> Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands (Hag. 1:9–11).

The negative sanctions had already been imposed. There had been no prophet who warned them 14 years earlier what the penalties would be if they ceased work on the temple. Why not? Because God expected them to understand the system of covenantal causality. There are visible positive sanctions for obedience to the Mosaic law, just as there are visible negative sanctions for disobeying it. Israelites should have learned this in the captivity. With respect to idolatry, they did. With respect to the temple, they didn't.

Haggai came to tell them to consider cause and effect. Their projects failed because they had put themselves first. Haggai called them to obey. "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord" (Hag. 1:8). But what were they asked to obey? Not a statute from the Mosaic law. They were asked to obey their consciences. Their covenantal understanding should by now have been greater than had been true before the captivity. They should have been able to add covenantal two plus two and get four. So far, they had not done this.

Haggai's prophetic message implied that there should be spiritual maturity over time, both individually and corporately. While there was no Mosaic statute compelling them to build a temple, God

expected them to build it. While there were no statutes specifying God's negative sanctions in response to such neglect, God expected the people to understand that Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 were still in force. He expected them to recognize covenantal causality in their lack of success. They did not recognize this, so He sent Haggai to remind them.

The people had matured. The leaders immediately responded to his message. Then the people did, too.

> Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD. Then spake Haggai the LORD's messenger in the LORD's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD. And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God (Hag. 1:12–14).

Conclusion

Haggai set forth the fundamental principle of biblical covenantal economics when he announced, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts" (2:8). The nation had forgotten this, just as nations generally do. His ministry was consistent with this principle of ownership. First things first. God's things come first.

He did not warn the nation of bad things to come despite contemporary prosperity, as the pre-exilic prophets had done. He reminded them of good things to come despite contemporary failure. "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts" (2:9). Before the exile, Israelites had been the beneficiaries of wealth, but they had attributed this to other gods. After the exile, they had experienced comprehensive failure, but they had attributed this to nothing in particular. Haggai reminded them that God is the God of both negative sanctions and positive sanctions. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 had asserted this, but the post-exilic generation was almost as blind to this as the pre-exilic generation had been. Almost, but not quite. God, through Haggai, opened their eyes.

ZECHARIAH

INTRODUCTION TO ZECHARIAH

> *Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words. So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy.*
>
> ZECHARIAH 1:12–14

As a post-exilic prophet, Zechariah did not bring a message of imminent destruction. He brought a message of hope. Of all the prophets, he was the messenger of comprehensive hope.

His message matched that of his contemporary, Haggai. His message was simple: finish the temple. "Therefore thus saith the Lord; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem" (Zech. 1:16). There would soon be positive sanctions. "Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem" (Zech. 1:17). Negative sanctions were coming, but not to Israel.

> For thus saith the Lord of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. For, behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and ye shall know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me. Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto thee (Zech. 2:8–11).

Of all the books in the Bible that bring the message of the comprehensive victory of covenant-keepers, in time and on earth, Zechariah is the most detailed.

32

PEACE AND PROSPERITY

For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbour. But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the Lord *of hosts. For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.*

ZECHARIAH 8:10–12

A. The Division of Labor

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] Zechariah describes what it was like to live inside the land during the days of exile for the Israelites. The Samaritans and the few Israelites who had not been carried off lived in a society in which there was no trust, "for I set all men every one against his neighbour." The division of labor had collapsed because there was no cooperation. Hence, there were no wages.

What was also missing was peace. "Neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction." The Hebrew word translated "affliction" is usually translated "enemy" or "adversary." This was not competition, where one man competed with another for a job. There were no jobs. It was more in the nature of warfare.

This meant that output must have collapsed. Economic coopera-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

tion allows the division of labor to increase production due to specialization. Each person concentrates on what he does best. The result is greater output per unit of resource input.

This was about to change. "But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts." The Hebrew word translated as "residue" is usually translated as "remnant." Example: "And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things." The remnant in this context was the relative handful of Israelites who had returned from the Babylonian captivity. "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness" (Zech. 8:7–8).

B. A Healed Environment

Zechariah proclaims that the environment would change. "For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things." The phrase, "the heavens shall give their dew," indicates that the environment had been under a curse.

The land had been given comparative rest. God had promised this centuries before.

> And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it (Lev. 26:33–35).

The desolation of the land was also its healing. Because the rains slowed, the land was not overworked by the new inhabitants. What had functioned as a curse for Israelites functioned as a healing process for the land.

Jeremiah had foreseen what would happen in his lifetime.

> And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years (II Chron. 36:20–21).

The period of rest for the land had come to an end. Now its productivity would flourish under the care of the restored remnant. The restoration of the people to the land had also been predicted by God. Moses had told them:

> Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes. And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the Lord (Lev. 26:42–45).

C. The Restoration of Production

Zechariah announces God's revelation regarding the new situation. "But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the Lord of hosts." There would not be the universal fear and distrust that had governed society during the exile. There would be peace. So, there would be prosperity. "For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase."

Cooperation is the basis of prosperity. Peace is the basis of cooperation. Members of a peaceful society do not spend extensive time and money to defend themselves. They can live their lives without worrying about violence. They can, in the familiar phase, go about their business. Business expands.

As the division of labor expands, output per unit of input rises. Seeds grow. Vines produce fruit. The ground gives its increase. The division of labor does not affect rainfall, but it makes rainfall more productive. Whatever the land was capable of producing, peace would make such production more likely.

Peace was part of a liturgical blessing.

> And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise [in this way] ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace (Num. 6:22–26).

A curse would become evident whenever peace and prosperity were removed.

> And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven (Deut. 29:19–20).

D. War and Poverty

Modern textbooks speak of war expenditures as productive economically. The Bible does not teach this. It teaches that peace produces prosperity. Then what does war produce? Poverty. Speaking of the Amorites and Moabites, Moses said: "Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee. Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever" (Deut. 23:5–6).

Mercantilists and Keynesians agree: war can be profitable. For a minority of individuals, yes. For society as a whole, no. The capital used to produce a weapon could have been used to produce a consumer good. The taxes necessary for military production could have been left in the hands of taxpayers, to spend or invest. The debt used to finance a war could have financed factories and research. The fractional reserve banking system's fiat money, which is used to buy the government's debt, lowers the value of the currency unit. This impoverishes those on fixed monetary incomes. Only when armaments do not lead to war, or when they are used to repel invaders, do they make society richer, for they protect the peace or a social order based on peace.

Conclusion

Peace and prosperity are covenantally linked. They are closely related positive corporate sanctions. The close connection between peace and prosperity extends across the boundaries of time and geography. So does the connection between war and poverty.

There had been a time in Israel when individuals had little peace, little cooperation, and little prosperity. Those days were over, Zechariah announced. A new day had dawned. If the nation conformed to

the Mosaic law-order, it would prosper. The prophet called them to repentance, just as pre-exilic prophets had done. The people had not listened before the captivity. Zechariah offered their descendants an opportunity to gain the positive corporate sanctions offered by the Mosaic Covenant.

MALACHI

INTRODUCTION TO MALACHI

Malachi means "my messenger." His ministry is believed to have begun after the remnant's return from Persia in 536 B.C. The common estimate is mid-fifth century. There is no solid evidence for this. It is sometimes argued that he used the Persian word for *governor* in Malachi 1:8, but the same word is used in I Kings 10:15 and 20:24. He referred to the temple in Malachi 3:1, but the context of this reference is a future messenger. This does not prove that the second temple had been built yet. The strongest evidence is the text's shared commitment with themes in Nehemiah: marriages with foreign women (Mal. 2:11–15; Neh. 13:23–27), failure to pay the tithe (Mal. 3:8–10; Neh. 13:10–14), and priestly corruption (Mal. 1:7–14; Neh. 13:7–9). Nehemiah's return from Persia is commonly believed to have taken place in 444 B.C.

The book of Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament. This is appropriate, for Malachi was the last prophet to leave a written record that became canonical. He prophesied regarding the coming of a greater prophet. "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 3:1). Jesus identified this prophet: John the Baptist.

> And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom

> of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias [Elijah], which was for to come (Matt. 11:7–14).

In between Malachi and John the Baptist, we have no written record of any prophet who brought a covenant lawsuit against Israel.

Malachi's covenant lawsuit was direct and comprehensive. He blamed the priests for the post-exilic era of corruption. "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 3:7–8). *The ecclesiastical leadership was corrupt.* "Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" (Mal. 2:17). This was the same accusation that Isaiah had brought against Judah three centuries earlier. He had prophesied that this willful perversity of judgment would eventually end. "The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful" (Isa. 32:5). Malachi warned them: it had not ended yet.

It had not ended in John the Baptist's day, either. The religious leaders were still corrupt. "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matt. 3:7).

It would be a mistake to interpret Malachi as anything but remotely concerned with economic reform. His concern with economic matters was limited. He had two complaints. First, the sons of Levi were oppressors and connivers with oppressors. God therefore threatened judgment. "And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 3:5). Second, the nation refused to pay the tithe (Mal. 3:8–9). This passage is widely quoted and even more widely disobeyed today. The Israelites in Malachi's day did not take the warning seriously. Neither do Christians today.

The final word in the book, meaning the final word in the Old Testament, is *curse*. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet be-

fore the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5–6). It was a warning of destruction by God. It was also a call to repentance.

33

STEALING FROM GOD

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

MALAHI 3:7–8

The theocentric issue here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] The fundamental principle of Christian economics is this: *God owns everything*. Christian economics begins with this principle. It therefore also ends with it. Christian economics is circular, as is true of everyconsistent system of human thought. That which is presupposed logically leads to a conclusion: the affirmation of that which is presupposed. In the same sense that God is both creator and final judge, so does the conclusion affirm the presupposition, not just in Christian thought but in Western thought generally.

The economic mark of God's ownership is the tithe. All men owe God a specified percentage of their income. Covenant-breakers are required to affirm this and then conform themselves to it. From other passages, we learn that a tithe was 10% of a rural land owner's net agricultural income. Under the Mosaic law, this was owed to the Levites (Lev. 27:32; Num. 18:21). Prior to the Mosaic law, Abram paid a tenth of his spoils to Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem (Heb. 7:1–3).[2]

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 29.

A. Theft = Not Paying

Here, Malachi introduces a fundamental judicial concept: *refusing to give what is required by God constitutes theft*. This is a broad judicial concept. It applies to everything covenantal. It establishes the judicial concept of property rights to a stream of income. There is no difference between *stealing legal title* to a judicially mandatory stream of income vs. *refusing to supply* this stream of income.

This principle of covenantal law establishes a principle of economics: *there is no economic autonomy*. It is therefore illegitimate to begin economic theory on the assumption that an individual, other than God, is sovereign over his property. He is subordinate to God, and God has mandated that other covenantal institutions have legitimate legal claims to a portion of his income.

These claims may not be legally enforceable in a civil court. This does not negate the claims. God's prophets warned Israel that He would enforce the legal claims of the Levites in His court. He had already intervened in history to impose negative sanctions. Haggai had told them: "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes" (Hag. 1:6).[3] God now offered Israel another opportunity to test the reliability of His covenantal sanctions in history. He offered positive sanctions.

> Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts (Mal. 3:10–12).

This offer had to do with visible blessings. Other nations would see God's sovereignty at work. But, if the Israelites refused to change their collective ways, the visible losses would continue.

3. Chapter 31.

B. Hierarchy and Tithing

Every oath-bound covenant has a hierarchy.[4] In the family covenant, the husband represents the wife before God, and the parents represent the children. The husband works to support his family. The flow of funds is downward. But, in their old age, parents are entitled to support by children. The flow of funds is upward when the children have wealth and their parents do not.[5]

In the other two covenantal governments—ecclesiastical and civil—administration is supported from the bottom up. The flow of funds is upward. The institutional church is entitled to a tithe from its members. The civil government is entitled to taxes of residents. Both church and state are under restraint. The church is entitled to no more than 10%. The state is entitled to less than 10%. Anything more than this constitutes civil tyranny, as Samuel warned Israel (I Sam. 8:14, 17).[6]

The judicial issue here is *covenantal representation*. All those who are represented by the leaders in a covenantal institution must pay for this privilege in some way. There are no free lunches and no free representation.

The tithe is an aspect of the priesthood. This was true in the Old Testament era before Moses. Abram paid a tithe to Melchizedek, for Melchizedek was the priest of Salem. In his own household, Abram was a priest and not under priestly authority. He paid no tithe. In Salem, he was under priestly authority, and therefore he paid a tithe for the privilege of being represented by the high priest (Gen. 14:18–21).[7]

In Moses' day, rural Israelites paid tithes to the Levites, who owned no rural land, and the Levites paid tithes to the family priests who officiated at the temple. The Levites were the tribe of Levi. The families were Merari, Gershon, and Kohath. Kohath supplied the priests, for it was the family of Aaron. The temple priests did not pay a tithe. They were the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. No one represented them ecclesiastically.

The tithe has to do with priestly representation. It had to do with the Mosaic sacrificial system only for as long as that representa-

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4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2; North, *Unconditional Surrender,* ch. 2.

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 25.

6. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 21.

tional system was mandatory. The tithe is a matter of the priesthood: Melchizedek's and Levi's.

C. A Single Storehouse

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 3:10a). The language is clear. First, there is a single storehouse. Second, it belongs to God. Third, God calls it His house.

Which tithe was Malachi talking about? The tithe of tithes, which went to the temple priests. This had always been required in Mosaic Israel. The Mosaic law was clear. The tithes of rural people went to the local Levites. They in turn tithed to the Aaronic priests, who oversaw the sacrifices at the tabernacle-temple (Num. 18:26–27). This was a bottom-up flow of wealth.

Note: the temple priests did not tithe. There was no one to tithe to. They were at the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Israel was a hierarchy of priests. God had told Moses, just before the giving of the Mosaic law, "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Ex. 19:6).[8]

The captivity had removed the people from the land. Very few Levites returned: 341 (Ezra 2:40–54). In contrast, 4,289 priests returned (Ezra 2:36–39). The priests were Levites, as members of the tribe of Levi, so they were supported by their share of the tithe. But the temple priests were paid extra to officiate at the temple. The Levites and priests submitted themselves to the Mosaic law on this point: a tenth of the tithe went to the temple priests. The people also understood this. They corporately confessed their faith in an act of covenant renewal. "They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes" (Neh. 10:29). They understood their responsibilities. They paid the Levites locally, but the tenth of a tenth was sent to the temple. This was the common storehouse.

> . . . that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the

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8. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 20.

> Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house (Neh. 10:37–38).

Why the temple? Because it was the earthly residence of God. It was where the holy of holies was, which had once housed the Ark of the Covenant, which had contained the covenantal implements that had been placed inside the tabernacle at the exodus: the golden censer, the tablets of the law, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod (Heb. 9:4). The tabernacle-temple had always been referred to as the house of the Lord. "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring unto the house of the Lord thy God" (Ex. 34:26a). "Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the Lord thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the Lord thy God" (Deut. 23:18).

So, the house of the Lord was the storehouse for the tithe of the tithes. Building the temple was the focus of concern in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. This was Malachi's concern, too. Thus, he reminds the nation of the national collection point for the tithe. He had to be speaking of the priestly tithe, not the Levitical tithe, which is why the Levitical tithe was collected locally, as we have seen (Neh. 10:37).

The temple tithe was judicially representative, just as the sacrifices were judicially representative. The tithe went to the priestly tribe, which had no inheritance in rural land. It was collected locally, but a representative 10% was sent to the priests at Jerusalem. This was the common storehouse. It was common because it was judicially representative.

D. The New Testament

There are only three references to Levites in the New Testament.[9] These references do not describe the Levites' specific functions. Levites were part of the religious leadership. "And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?" (John 1:19). The Sadducees were closely associated with the temple. They served as the priests.[10] The Pharisees were

9. Luke 10:32; John 1:19; Acts 4:36.

10. "Sadducees," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–6), pp. 630–33.

rivals of the Sadducees.[11] The Pharisees and scribes were interpreters of the law. The New Testament does not explicitly indicate how they were paid.

The scribes and Pharisees were not the officiating priests of the temple. The Sadducees were. So, the Pharisees and scribes owed tithes either to the Levites, or if they were themselves Levites, to the temple priests. Christ condemned the scribes and Pharisees for not being sufficiently faithful to the Mosaic law. They did tithe, He said, and this was proper. But it was not enough. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23).[12] Jesus' warning makes it clear that tithing is still required. We are not to let "the other"—tithing—undone. When I say clear, I mean "clear to anyone not trying to escape his requirement to tithe."

Theologians who deny the legitimacy of the tithe in the New Testament era try to escape the plain teaching of Christ. They deny that Matthew 23:23 applies to Christians or the church. Some say that He was preaching only to the scribes and Pharisees, who were still under the Mosaic order. This is an odd way to argue, since Christ Himself was under that order, as He said: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17–18).[13] We are asked to believe that He was speaking only to those two groups, not anyone else in Israel, and surely not speaking to us.[14] Others argue that the New Testament era is exclusively post-70 A.D., when the Mosaic sacrificial system ended with the Roman legions' destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Therefore, every rule announced by Christ was authoritative only for the Jews of His era, for He lived under the Mosaic sacrificial system. We do not. This line of reasoning is inherently antinomian. It leaves Christians with no uniquely biblical source of law, including the Ten Commandments. Dispensational pastor Donald Gray Barnhouse is representative of

11. "Pharisees," *ibid.*, pp. 661–66.

12. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 46.

13. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press, 2002).

14. Andreas J. Köstenberger and David A. Croteau, "'Will a Man Rob God?' (Malachi 3:8): A Study of Tithing in the Old and New Testaments," (2006), p. 19.

this line of reasoning. He wrote: "It was a tragic hour when the Reformation wrote the Ten Commandments into their creeds."[15]

I have said that the tithe is an aspect of the priesthood. Jesus is the high priest. This is the message of the epistle to the Hebrews.

> Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace (Heb. 6:20–7:2).[16]

This is the supreme priesthood. We know this because Melchizedek represented Abram before God, serving him bread and wine (Gen. 14:18).[17] Abram, not yet Abraham, had no son. Yet Abram represented Isaac, who represented Jacob, who represented Levi. Therefore, Hebrews insists, "Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him" (Heb. 7:9–10). Paying tithes "in Abraham" is covenantal language. It has to do with *legal representation*. Melchizedek had represented the unborn patriarchs in Salem. The argument of Hebrews is that he also represents us, as followers of the God of Abram. Jesus, as the heir of Melchizedek's office of high priest, represents us.

The author of Hebrews said that Jesus has forever replaced Levi as the high priest. Thus, there has been a change in the law. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. 7:12). We know that the church, like Israel, is a nation of priests. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (I Peter 2:9). Just as rural members of the nation of priests under Moses were required by biblical law to pay tithes to the Levites, and just as the Levites were required by biblical law to pay tithes to the temple priests, so are Christians, a royal priesthood, required by biblical law to pay tithes to the institutional church.[18] If they refuse, there will be

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15. Cited by S. Lewis Johnson, "The Paralysis of Legalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 120 (April/June 1963), p. 109. *Bibliotheca Sacra* in 1963 was published by Dallas Theological Seminary, then the world's leading dispensational institution of higher education.

16. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 29.

17. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 21.

18. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

negative corporate sanctions on the church. If they obey, there will be positive corporate sanctions.

E. Land and Tithe in Post-Exilic Israel

There is no evidence, biblical or extra-biblical, that the empires that controlled Israel after the exile enforced the pre-exilic land distribution of the families. Thry did not enforce the jubilee laws governing the return of land to the heirs of the conquest generation.

This created a problem for the law governing the Levitical tithe. The Levites were entitled to the tithe of the increase from the land. This was their inheritance. They did not receive rural land, as the other tribes did. They could own property in the 48 Levitical cities. They could own land in walled cities, as anyone could. But they could not inherit rural land. This allowed them to live in all of the tribal regions.

The Mosaic civil government enforced the Levitical tithe because this was a matter of a property right. It was to be as secure as rural land. I have argued that only the increase from rural land was subject to the tithe because this was the Levites' alternative to land ownership. Those living in walled cities and Levitical cities did not owe the tithe because, in those jurisdictions, the Levites were not discriminated against in germs of property ownership.

After the exile, all this changed. Anyone could own land, as far as the evidence indicates. There is no indication in the New Testament that Levites were exclusively urban property owners. So, if the Levites suffered no disadvantage, on what basis were they eligible for a tithe? Because the civil government no longer had a lawful role in enforcing the Levitical tithe, the hierarchy shifted from the civil government to the church. The tithe became an obligation for all those who were part of the ecclesiastical community. The pre-exilic structure of the tithe still existed in the post-exilic era: a tenth of the Levites' tenth went to the temple priests (Neh. 10:38). What had changed was the enforcement agency. The tithe was now owed by all covenant-keepers, not just owners of rural land. But the basis of this obligation was now ecclesiastical service, not tribal inheritance. The requirement to tithe became geographically universal. This is why Jesus told the Pharisees that they owed the tithe (Matt. 23:23).

Conclusion

Malachi made it clear that he came in the name of God. He accused the nation of cheating God by not tithing. He called this theft. He offered corporate positive sanctions for repentance: the open window of heaven and the rebuke of the devourer. Haggai had already told them that they were under negative sanctions: a money bag with holes in it.

Because the tithe he spoke of was to be placed in a common storehouse—specifically, God's house: the temple—he had to be speaking of the Levites' tithe to the temple priests. This was a representative tithe of the Levites' right of inheritance. We know this from both the Mosaic law of the priestly tithe and from the account in Nehemiah regarding the collection of the priestly tithe.

The tithe in question was the two-fold Mosaic tithe: Levitical and priestly. It went to the priests of the temple. It was a temple tithe because it was a priestly tithe. If the Levites had to tithe to the temple priests, as the Mosaic law required, then surely the nation had to tithe to the Levites. If they obeyed, they would be blessed with positive corporate sanctions. That was Malachi's message to post-exilic Israel. If they disobeyed, there would be negative corporate sanctions. That was Haggai's message to post-exilic Israel.

CONCLUSION

Yet the Lord *testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the* Lord *their God. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the* Lord *had charged them, that they should not do like them.*

II KINGS 17:13–15

A. Covenant Lawsuits

The prophets brought a series of covenant lawsuits against Israel and Judah. They prophesied corporate negative sanctions, culmination in national captivity. These lawsuits were ignored by the people and their leaders. The corporate negative sanctions came, as prophesied, culminating in the final round of sanctions: the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.[1] Furthermore, the prophets invoked the Mosaic law as the legal foundation of their covenant lawsuits against the nation. The Mosaic law was authoritative because it specified institutional sanctions: familial, civil, and ecclesiastical. Without these sanctions, the Mosaic law would have been merely a catalogue of moral suggestions. The prophets would have been moral philosophers, comparable perhaps to Socrates and Plato, but no more authoritative.

For modern Christian critics of the prevailing economic order to

1. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 2007). David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997).

invoke the prophets as witnesses against the prevailing economic order is disingenuous if they do not also affirm the existence of God's predictable, visible, corporate covenantal sanctions in history. The prophets possessed lawful authority to speak on God's behalf. They lawfully invoked God's negative historical sanctions. They warned Israel of negative corporate sanctions to come if the nation ignored their warnings and did not repent.

B. The Authority of Biblical Law Today

What relevance do the prophets' warnings have for Christians who live in the New Testament era? Here, most Protestant theologians do whatever they can to avoid answering. If they say the prophets' message has judicial relevance, then corporate covenantal sanctions must still be in force. This conclusion is much too controversial, for it raises the judicial issue of theonomy and the political issue of Christian Reconstruction. But if they say "no judicial relevance," this makes them sound like antinomians, which they are, hermeneutically speaking. So, they write paragraphs such as the following, in order to avoid dealing straightforwardly with the judicial and moral problem.

> An important consideration in connection with this pericope [Mal 3] is whether the demands and the promises are also applicable in the NT dispensation, as they were under the OT dispensation. Our answer must be "Yes" and "No." Yes, because there is continuity in connection with both our obligation to fulfill our stewardship and the promises of God's blessing in our lives. This cannot be denied. At the same time our answer must be "No," because we also have a discontinuity pertaining to the specific relationship between the OT and the NT and the relative dispensations. The discontinuity consists especially in the outward scheme of things, regarding both the obligations and the promises.[2]

This is theological doubletalk. Prophecy in the Old Testament was covenantal. It had to do with covenant lawsuits, to which were attached covenantal corporate sanctions. So, in order to invoke the authority of the prophets, a New Testament era critic of society must also invoke the authority of biblical law: its oaths, its institutional hierarchies, its stipulations, and its sanctions.

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2. Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 311. Cited by Andreas J. Köstenberger and David A. Croteau, "Reconstructing a Biblical Model for Giving: A Discussion of Relevant Systematic Issues and New Testament Principles" (2006), p. 8. I have offered an extended critique of Croteau's position on tithing in *Perspectives on Tithing: 4 Views*, ed. David A. Croteau (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2011), ch. 9.

The social critics rarely do this. Apart from the theonomists and British Israelites, the economic critics reject the Mosaic law, as well as any New Testament social order based on extensions into the New Testament era of its stipulations and sanctions. They do not offer a hermeneutic that provides guidance as to which Mosaic laws extend into the New Testament era and which do not. They reject the theonomists' hermeneutic: still binding unless annulled by New Testament revelation, i.e., "innocent until proven guilty."[3]

C. Rewriting the Prophets

Within the evangelical community in the Anglo-American world are church members who are committed to the welfare state. They not only accept the tenets of the welfare state's political order, they actively promote it within their circles.

In their search for justification of their political commitment, they return again and again to the prophets. They also cite a handful of texts in the Mosaic law, most notably the jubilee laws (Lev. 25),[4] which were all annulled with the ministry of Christ (Luke 4:16–21).[5] If the jubilee was not annulled by the New Testament, then the law authorizing intergenerational slavery would still validate the practice (Lev. 25:44–46).[6] Liberation theologians never mention this aspect of the jubilee. They also categorically refuse to accept the judicial authority of the vast bulk of the Mosaic law's economic passages. Above all, they refuse to go to this verse:

> Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour (Lev. 19:15).[7]

When men invoke the prophets as moral guides for modern times, it is utterly illegitimate for them to deny the law-order that the prophets invoked as justifying their covenant lawsuits. Yet the liberation theologians, some of whom were Marxists before the embarrassing collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, do exactly this. They invoke

3. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), ch. 1.

4. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), chaps. 25–32.

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

6. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 31.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

the prophets, yet they dismiss the Mosaic law as no longer judicially binding. *This is not an oversight. It is self-conscious deception by supposed experts in the Scriptures*. They come in the name of God as would-be prophets, bringing their would-be covenant lawsuits against society in general and Christians in particular. Their listeners are told that they are accomplices of economic oppressors. The accusation is true, for they are partial supporters of the welfare state, which is a system based on oppression on a massive scale. The welfare state rests on this commandment: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

The liberation theologians' criticism is that the modern American state has not gone far enough, since it extracts only about 40% of the nation's output through taxes and regulation. This 40% is twice the tax rate imposed by the Pharaoh under Joseph. "And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt unto this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth part; except the land of the priests only, which became not Pharaoh's" (Gen. 47:26). This was God's judgment on Egypt, which worshipped a supposedly divine god-king.[8] The modern world would have to cut taxes by half in order to get back to the most bureaucratic social order of the pre-Mosaic world. Our would-be prophets never mention this, for obvious reasons. In the name of Jesus, they cry out for even greater taxation than twice the taxation of Pharaonic Egypt.[9]

Within American Protestant evangelicalism, their movement is tiny and is generally limited to people who majored in the liberal arts in college. They are not popular within the broader evangelical, Lutheran, and fundamentalist community. But, because they gain the support of Left-wing humanists in the media, they receive a lot of publicity. This makes their movement seem larger than it is.

D. The Economics of the Prophets

I have systematically exegeted the Mosaic economic laws, verse by verse, beginning in 1973. I have completed the exegesis. This has been a long, arduous task. I find that the critics who publicly invoke the prophets' economic criticisms of Israel rarely refer to the Mosaic

8. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012),ch. 32:C.

9. For critiques of this position, see David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, 3rd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1981] 1996). See also my page titled, "I Have Some Questions for Jim Wallis," at garynorth.com/public/department61.cfm (accessed January 16, 2021). See also my responses in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984).

statutes invoked by the prophets. They also never refer to any of my economic commentaries on the Mosaic law, which total 14 volumes: Exodus 20 to Deuteronomy 31.

Thus, a reader would be wise to examine carefully the alleged connections between the prophets and the social critics' recommended economic reforms, which are too often calls for coercive intervention into the economy by the state. The reader should ask these questions.

> Did the prophets call on the civil government to intervene in the Old Testament passages cited by the critics?
>
> Did the relevant Mosaic statutes call on the state to intervene?
>
> Does the critic identify the Mosaic statute in each passage from the prophets?
>
> Does the critic explain the context of the Mosaic statute?
>
> Does the critic's proposed economic reform violate any Mosaic statute?
>
> Does the critic argue that the Mosaic law offers us an authoritative blueprint for economics?
>
> Does the critic in fact deny that the Mosaic law offers a blueprint for economics?
>
> Does the critic invoke the New Testament as offering a blueprint for economics?
>
> Does the critic refer to a comprehensive study of the New Testament which identifies the structure and details of this alleged blueprint?

Be alert to the possibility that the critic is systematically misusing the prophets in order to promote some version of liberation theology—not the dead Marxist version of the 1970s and 1980s, but rather a softened version of socialism or Keynesian interventionism aimed at Protestant audiences.

E. Principles of Interpretation

The prophets came before Israel and Judah with covenant lawsuits. They invoked the Mosaic law. They therefore warned of negative corporate sanctions to come, but also offered hope: positive corporate sanctions to come. They called on their listeners to repent. This repentance would have corporate implications. It would also require corporate reforms.

In their catalogue of transgressions, individual and corporate, were economic sins. With the exception of Isaiah, the prophets listed very few economic transgressions. As a percentage of the size of the book of Isaiah, the list of economic sins constituted very little.

This should serve as a warning to contemporary readers. First, the prophets invoked the Mosaic law. Second, they invoked corporate sanctions in terms of specific Mosaic statutes. Third, the context of their predictions of specific things to come was the Mosaic law: statutes and sanctions. Fourth, they called on their listeners to repent.

The fifth point relates to the specific economic transgressions listed by the prophets. There were few of them, and they all referred back to the Mosaic law. Therefore, all contemporary Christian critics of contemporary economic institutions and practices who invoke the Old Testament prophets, but who then refuse to turn to the Mosaic law as the judicial basis of their criticisms are practicing deception, beginning with self-deception. They implore their readers to take seriously the moral issues raised by the prophets, yet they themselves do not take seriously the judicial context of the prophets' criticisms of the social order and economic practices of their contemporaries. The judicial context was the nation's abandonment of the Mosaic law.

I have never argued that all of the statutes of the Mosaic law carry over into the New Covenant. The bulk of them do not. I have argued that there is a Bible-based hermeneutic that lets us filter out the annulled laws. This hermeneutic distinguishes among four categories.

1. Land laws
2. Seed laws
3. Priestly laws
4. Cross-boundary laws[10]

Only laws in the fourth category of Mosaic laws carry over into the New Covenant. Many of these cross-boundary laws were economic laws. Among the civil laws that did not carry over were the laws associated with the Jubilee, which included chattel slavery (Lev. 25:44–46), the laws mandating the civil enforcement of the tithe for the Levites, laws governing real estate ownership in walled cities, laws governing land inherited by daughters, gleaning laws, and the laws of levirate marriage. Civil laws that did carry over are laws prohibiting false balances, laws enforcing restitution for theft, laws prohibiting the withholding of wages, laws discriminating against non-citizens, laws favoring one group against another, and laws against fraud.

In contrast are the contemporary critics of modern free market capitalism who call for an extension of the welfare state's policies of

10. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, Conclusion.

coercive redistribution of private wealth. The two most prominent organizations in the United States that promote this view are Sojourners and Evangelicals for Social Action, by which they mean state action. Not one of their representatives has written so much a single volume of exegesis of the Mosaic economic laws. Not one of them has offered a book on the hermeneutic principles governing the application of Mosaic statutes in the New Covenant era. Not one of them has offered a systematic book on Christian economic casuistry: the application of biblical moral principles to specific economic practices. We have waited for over 40 years. So, until one of them does, and until a dozen of his fellow collectivists hail his breakthrough as authoritative, and then write their critiques of contemporary economic practice in terms of his methodology, I suggest that you impose your own "prophetic" judgment: "Case not proven."

Conclusion

The title of this book is *Restoration and Dominion*. Restoration is the outcome of repentance. What has repentance got to do with dominion? We can see this most clearly in the message of the prophets, but especially Zechariah.

The prophets brought a series of covenant lawsuits against Israel and Judah. They were essentially the same lawsuit. The two nations had abandoned the Mosaic law. Unless they repented, God would impose the negative sanctions of the law listed in the longer, later sections of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. On the other hand, if they did repent, God would withdraw the negative sanctions and bring the positive sanctions, as promised in the shorter introductory sections of these two passages.

In investing, there is a saying: "Cut your losses, and let your profits run." If an investor can eliminate his losses, the gains will compound. The secret of investment success is this: do not lose money. This assumes that growth is inherent in capitalism. But economic growth is not inherent. It is the outcome of a combination of factors: private property, the enforcement of contracts, stable money, future-orientation, entrepreneurship, and the rule of law. Where these exist, there will be economic growth if negative sanctions are avoided: war, plague, and famine. These negative sanctions are restricted by God in response to a society's obedience to His Bible-revealed law.

The prophets offered dominion, but only on God's covenantal terms. Israel rejected these terms. Their inheritance was removed in

70 A.D. It was transferred to the church. The same covenantal terms apply. The same interrelated system of law and sanctions applies. The same offer applies: repentance and dominion.